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**LEVELLING UP:
WHAT ENGLAND THINKS**

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FOREWORD

Since the election of Boris Johnson's Conservative Government in 2019, British politics has been dominated by discussion of 'levelling up'. We have seen the appointment of ministers and secretaries of state for handling it, the introduction of white papers on regional inequality, and a multitude of reports about what policies might work best — from the construction of new housing and transport infrastructure to the opening of new museums and the devolution of power from Westminster.

For all this discussion, however, the views and opinions of the public seem to have been overlooked. This report aims to fill that gap. We partnered with YouGov to carry out a survey of over 20,000 people from across England. This was the first survey of its kind on levelling up and regional inequality, and the first to assess the impact of changes to how England is governed, including the effect of the introduction of Metro Mayors. The survey was supplemented by a series of focus groups conducted in five areas of England by the Policy Institute at King's College London.

Our aim was to find out how people in England feel about their local communities, what policies they feel would be most effective when it comes to 'levelling up' the country, how they would like these policies to be delivered, and who they trust to deliver them.

UK in a Changing Europe was established in 2015 to promote rigorous, high-quality and independent research into the EU-UK relationship. Seven years on, we are entering a new phase of our existence, with an expansive new agenda. This includes more work on various aspects of post-Brexit Britain. In that spirit, this report presents the latest research on how the British electorate feels about a key element of the Government's agenda, and one of the most crucial political issues facing the country today.

I'd like to express my thanks to Suzanne Hall, Will Jennings, Lawrence McKay, Sophie Stowers, Paula SurrIDGE and Alan Wager for putting together the survey, the focus groups and the final report. Particular thanks are due to Sophie and Alan for their tireless work when it came to writing and rewriting the text and producing the various graphics. You will both be rewarded in heaven (though almost certainly not before). Thanks too to Anthony Broxton, Alex Walker and John Barlow for copy editing the text, and facilitating the design of the final piece.

I think the report that follows makes an important and original contribution to the debate about regional inequality in England, and how to tackle it, and very much hope you will too.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For all the discussion there has been about ‘levelling up’ and the problem of regional inequality in the UK, little energy has been expended in finding out how people feel about their areas, what could and should be done to improve them, and who they trust to actually do it. The following report aims to fill this gap. Based on a **unique survey of 20,000 people**, it outlines what people think about these issues, and how views differ between people living in different parts of England.

Our findings shed significant light on what people think about the Levelling Up agenda. First, most respondents agree that there should be some redistribution of income from ‘better off’ to ‘worse off’ areas, regardless of age, level of education, or social grade. However, **redistributive policy is much more popular amongst Labour voters than Conservatives**. This strong partisan divide raises the question of whether redistributive policy — and action to tackle regional inequality — is natural territory for a Conservative Government.

Furthermore, **over half of respondents believe that their local area gets significantly less government spending and investment than it deserves** (this is felt most strongly in the North of England- particularly the North East and North West). **Conservative voters, however, are divided:** those in the South of England are much more likely to believe that the North gets its fair share of funding.

Despite concerns about underfunding, **people across England are proud of the areas they live in** and use broadly positive terms to describe them. Insofar as there is variation, this is at a very local level, below that of even local authorities. **‘Neighbourhoods,’ in other words, are key.** Perhaps less surprisingly, **pride does vary as a function of financial security**, with those feeling less secure the most likely to want to move away from their local area, and expressing less pride in it. There is broad agreement that parks and green spaces, the people who live in an area, local businesses and the high street are key to generating local pride.

When it comes to how people feel about their area relative to others, the picture becomes somewhat more varied. **People across England think their area provides less opportunities for young people and offers fewer good jobs than other parts of the country.** Equally, on average they think that their area has better schools and housing, and lower levels of crime than others.

Digging into the data, those living in ‘inner city cosmopolitan’ neighbourhoods — often in London — are the only ones who believe they have better opportunities and more good jobs than other parts of the country. Meanwhile,

those in rural neighbourhoods are much more likely to view their area as having less crime than other parts of England.

People tend to identify crime rates and the cost of transport as the things that have worsened most in their local area over the course of the last decade. Again, perhaps predictably, those in poorer, urban neighbourhoods are much more likely to think that crime rates have increased in the last decade, and that their areas have declined in general. Neighbourhoods with lower levels of local pride are also more likely to believe that their area is in decline.

As for solutions to the problems which respondents identify in their local areas, there is a marked reluctance to look backward (in contrast to the focus groups we carried out in [2019](#), when participants spoke of their hope that old manufacturing industries might return post-Brexit). **Respondents did not want past industries to return, but, rather, something new to replace those that once gave their community a sense of purpose.** When it comes to the changes that would have the greatest impact, **people believe that action to reduce crime and improve access to good quality healthcare is key.** Indeed, in both our survey data and in our focus groups, policies to reduce crime are not only popular, but linked to other issues, including the availability of opportunities for young people, as well as the access to good-quality housing.

Strikingly, policies falling within the scope of central government — crime and health — tend to be seen as more important than those for which local leaders are responsible, such as improving access to shops. Policy preferences vary by area. **Reducing crime is by far the most popular option amongst those living in poorer, more urban areas, while those in more rural and more affluent parts of the country prioritise access to healthcare and housing above reducing crime.**

High streets have been the object of much attention in the debate over levelling up, and our research illustrates that they have a symbolic importance for many respondents. **The better the state of their high street, the prouder respondents are of their local community.** However, a majority of people surveyed felt their local high street has got worse in the last decade, noting empty and boarded up shops and litter. These findings, however, vary by location. **Those in inner city cosmopolitan areas think their local high streets are improving:** in parts of Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh and Manchester, people remarked on an increasing number of independent shops, wine bars and restaurants.

When it comes to the broad question of inequality, **respondents were sensitive to, and frustrated by, intra as much as inter regional issues.** They frequently compared their local area to other towns and cities nearby, which they feel receive more investment or are developing more rapidly than their community. There was

also a particular sense amongst respondents in the North of England that places in London and the South East are doing better than their local area. However, on this score they often express frustration with local leadership — such as local authorities or metro mayors.

Indeed, **the public has low levels of trust in English political institutions in general.** Only around a third of people express trust in mayors, local MPs and councils. The figures for national government are far lower. However, respondents were more likely to believe their elected representatives care about their area and to trust them if they voted for that party. **Partisanship, in other words, still has a significant impact on faith and trust in politics.**

In general, **people are inclined to believe that those in positions of political authority do not care about their area.** Yet the more local the level of representation, the more likely people are to believe political leaders do care. **Those felt to care most were local councillors.** Yet, even here, over 50% of respondents did not believe even these elected representatives cared.

Here too, location matters. **Those in urban, metropolitan areas are more likely to believe their local MP is in touch with local needs, while those in rural areas think local government cares more.** Metro Mayors are deemed to be less ‘in touch’ with local needs than MPs or Councillors but are more trusted than political parties or the government at Westminster. **Ben Houchen, Mayor of Tees Valley, is the Metro Mayor thought to most care about their local area amongst voters.** However, only 45% of respondents in his mayoralty share this opinion. Indeed, **we actually find the highest reported level of trust in Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester.**

Recent scandals have also affected trust in political institutions. Our focus groups show that investigations into Government rule breaking affected trust in Westminster, with respondents declaring themselves to be more likely to question the Government’s judgement as a result of them.

As for how levelling up should be carried forward, **the public prefer decisions on local funding to be made using a needs-based approach.** A process excluding ministerial discretion is the most popular amongst respondents — something of a vote of no confidence in the existing system for levelling-up funds.

Despite being one of the key ‘levelling up’ priorities, **cultural and heritage projects were less popular targets for spending** amongst respondents than alternatives.

Community consultation and full transparency are key. Strikingly, whether or not the local community is consulted on a project, and the transparency of the process, matters just as much to respondents as the amount of money that is spent on a levelling up project.

INTRODUCTION

‘Levelling up’ has hardly featured in the Conservative leadership contest. Yet the phrase has dominated the political agenda since 2019, to the point that regional inequality has become a key issue for the Conservative Party. The first Secretary of State for Levelling Up was appointed under a Conservative Prime Minister in 2021, a £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund was announced by the Treasury later that year, and a White Paper outlining the Government’s ‘levelling up’ agenda was finally presented to MPs in early 2022.

The 2016 referendum first focussed political attention on the frustrations of ‘left behind’ areas, after swathes of them voted to leave the European Union. Its outcome has been interpreted by many as an expression of disaffection with the political establishment, and the frustrations of these areas. In many ways, the levelling up agenda is about central government seeking to redress this discontent.

Since the 2019 election, much work has gone into considering the substantive action and policies which could be employed to tackle regional inequality. Analysis has found that, not only is there a significant difference in centrally allocated spending per person between metropolitan areas such as London and other parts of England — [with consequent gaps in growth and productivity](#) — but that there are particular differences when it comes to infrastructure investment. This includes the construction of affordable [housing](#), and the affordability and accessibility of [transport](#).

But strikingly, discussion of levelling up has to date often excluded the views and opinions of the public themselves. Even where work has attempted to explore this, it has often been small scale, and has not allowed us to compare how different people in different parts of the country feel about regional inequality. Our work aims to fill this gap by considering not only how people feel about their local areas, but their perceptions of how they have changed for better or worse, the things their areas are lacking, and the types of policies and investment which would most benefit their standard of living and their local communities. We not only look at which levelling up policies the public wants, but how they would prefer them to be delivered, and who they trust to deliver them.

In partnership with YouGov, we conducted an online survey of over 20,000 people from across England. This is not only the largest survey of its kind on levelling up, but the sheer size of our sample allows us to compare attitudes towards the government, the ‘levelling up’ agenda and regional inequality between

people living in different types of places across England — at a super local level — for the first time. This was accompanied by a series of focus groups, conducted by Suzanne Hall from King's College London's Policy Institute, in areas across England deemed to be 'left behind'. This included metropolitan boroughs, rural towns and coastal communities. More information on our methodology can be found in the [Annex](#).

Our findings indicate clearly that people are aware of the Government's plans to 'level up' the country, and that they see this an opportunity to ensure investment in those parts of the country which have historically lagged behind others. However, what this means in practice for local communities is much less apparent. Despite this, the public have a clear idea about what their local area needs, how these policies should be delivered, and who by.

We believe that this report makes an important contribution at a moment when a new Prime Minister has taken up residence in Downing Street. Our report outlines not only the levelling up policies and processes that would be most popular with the electorate, but also the issues that a new Conservative Government could face in attempting to tackle regional inequality. Our analysis also highlights the way in which economic crisis, a perception of decline in public services more broadly and issues of public trust may combine to pose particular challenges for this policy agenda.

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WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK ABOUT REGIONAL INEQUALITY?

WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK ABOUT REGIONAL INEQUALITY?

SUMMARY

Action to tackle regional inequality is broadly popular. Most respondents agree that there should be some movement of income from ‘better off’ to ‘worse off’ areas, regardless of their age, level of education, or social grade.

Most people think that their local area doesn’t get its fair share of investment: Over half of respondents believe that their local area gets significantly less government spending than it deserves. However, this is felt most strongly in the North of England — particularly in the North East and North West.

Redistributive policy is much more popular amongst Labour voters than Conservatives. This strong partisan divide raises the question of whether redistributive policy to address regional inequality can sustain long-term, cross-party support.

Additionally, Conservative voters are much more split on this issue: Conservative voters in the South of England are much more likely to believe that the North gets its fair share of funding when compared to their peers in the North. Labour Party voters tend to agree that the South does receive more than its fair share of government spending, regardless of where in England they live.

The public is not just frustrated about regional inequality, but intra-regional inequality: Respondents frequently compared their local area to other towns and cities nearby, which they feel receive more investment or are developing more rapidly than their community. They often express frustration with local leadership — such as local authorities or metro mayors — about this.

Since the UK’s vote to leave the European Union in 2016, we have seen regional inequality rise up the political agenda. At the last general election, there appeared to be something approaching a national political consensus that the UK economy needed rebalancing.

Here, before we begin to look at policy solutions within the levelling up remit, we address two key questions: is there a consensus across England that regional inequality is a problem? And do people feel their own local area gets a fair deal?

THE URGENCY OF REGIONAL INEQUALITY

Our survey revealed that regional inequality is an issue the public is aware of, and that a majority of respondents believe that the Government should implement some kind of redistributive policy to tackle it. Some 68% of those surveyed agreed with the idea that ‘The Government should redistribute income from better off areas to those that are less well off’.

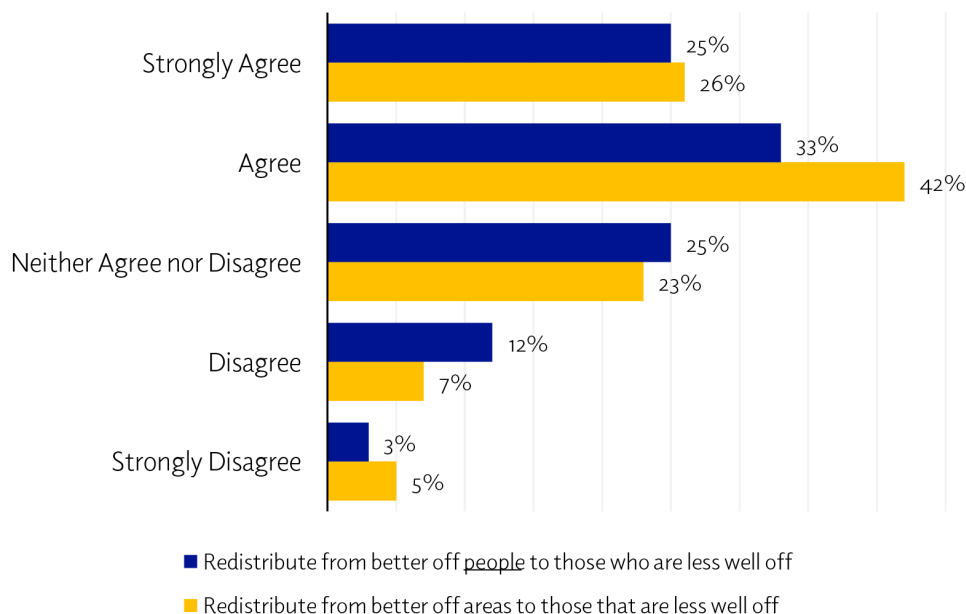
In principle, just one in ten disagree with the idea of moving funds from richer to poorer parts of the country. We also found little difference in this figure when comparing groups by age, gender, education or social grade, suggesting that redistributive regional policy is a broadly popular idea.

In findings that accord with previous research from [UK in a Changing Europe and the Policy Institute](#), we also found significantly broader support for measures to tackle regional rather than individual inequality. In other words, framing measures to tackle inequality around economic geography increases support for the idea of redistribution.

The public are more likely to support measures to tackle inequality between regions than inequality between people

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To what extent do you agree or disagree ... Government should redistribute from the better off to those who are less well off/better off areas to those who are less well off?



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19 April - 1 May. N = 20835

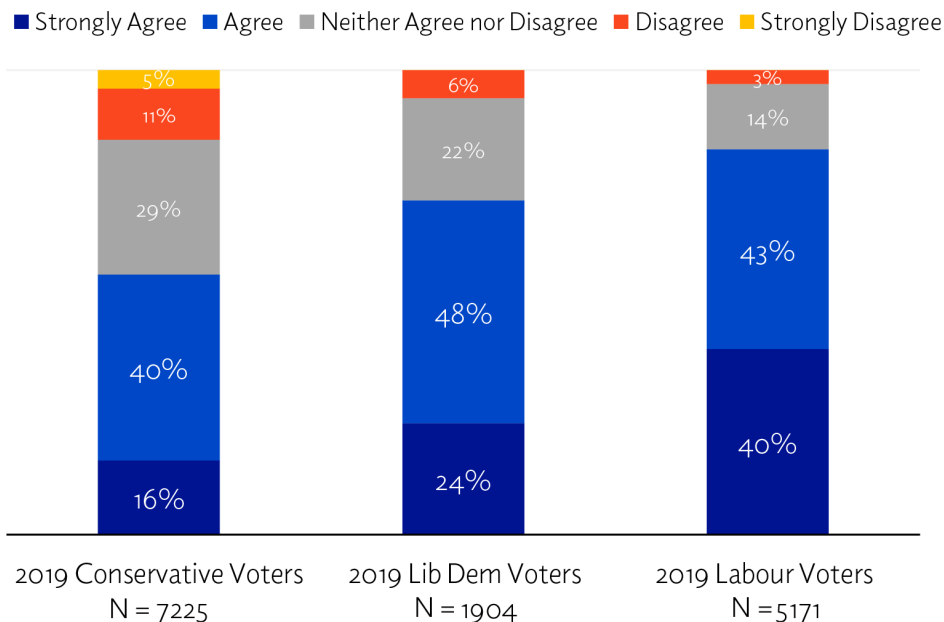
IS THERE A PARTY-POLITICAL DIVIDE ON TACKLING REGIONAL INEQUALITY?

While we see a broader basis of support for tackling regional rather than individual-level inequality, this does not mean equal support across the left and right. Despite it being a key plank of the Conservative election strategy in December 2019, those who voted for Labour were much more likely to agree that there should be some measures to tackle regional inequality than Conservative voters. While 83% of Labour voters agreed with the idea of redistribution to poorer areas, only 56% of Conservatives thought the same.

83% of 2019 Labour voters, and 56% of 2019 Tory voters, support the idea of redistribution to less well off areas

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Government should redistribute income from areas that are well off to areas that are less well off?

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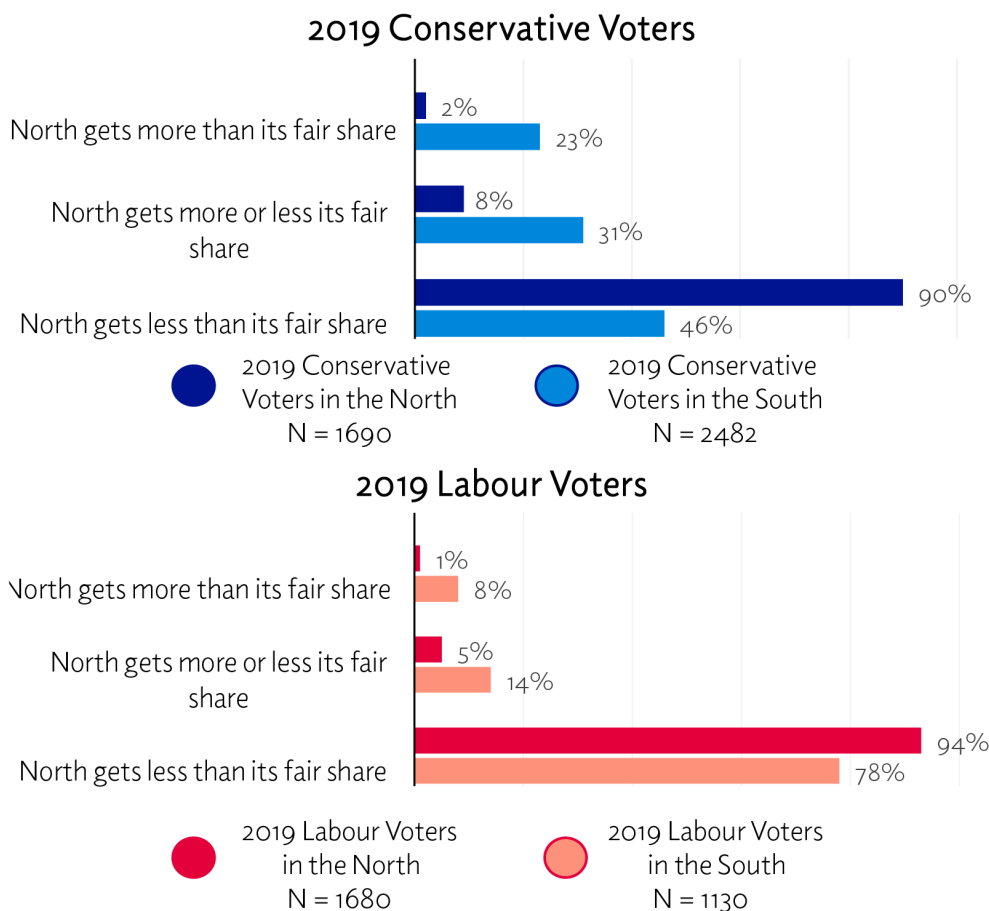


Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022.

The findings identify potential problems for the Conservative Party’s electoral coalition. Responses to the question of whether the North of England gets its fair share of government spending reveal a significant dichotomy. Some 90% of Conservative voters in the North of England feel the North does not get its fair share of spending — broadly equivalent to the 93% of Labour voters who agreed. Yet fewer than half of 2019 Conservative voters in the South of England (46%) agree that the North is unfairly treated. Labour simply does not have the same regional chasm in its electoral coalition, with 78% of Labour’s voters in the South believing the North does not get a fair share of spending.

Most Conservative voters in the South of England do not think that the North gets a bad deal from the Government

Do you think that the North of England gets more or less than its fair share of government spending?



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022.

The obvious conclusion is that explicit appeals to further regional redistribution from the South to the North fragments the Conservative coalition in a way that it does not for Labour.

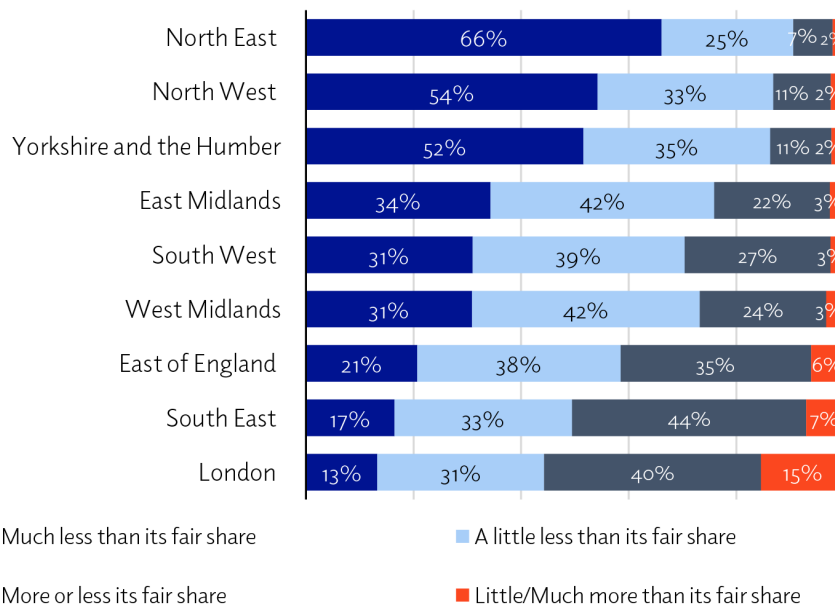
DO PEOPLE FEEL THEIR OWN AREA GETS A FAIR DEAL?

One of the dilemmas around levelling up is the fact that, if it is to mean a redistribution of resources from some areas to others, there will be winners and losers. Those parts of the country that currently get a better deal than others will lose out.

However, when we ask whether their own area gets roughly its fair share, much more, slightly more, slightly less or much less than its fair share of government funding, we find that nearly everyone agrees that where they live gets, at most, roughly its fair share. Indeed, no areas in England believe their area gets more than its fair share.

Generally, people living in the North of England were significantly more likely to believe their area was treated unfairly when it came to the allocation of resources. People in the North East (91%) were the most likely to believe that the Government does not give their area its fair share of funding, with 66% of respondents stating their region got much less than its fair share. This is in stark contrast to respondents in London. 44% of Londoners polled believed their region got less than its fair share of funding, with just 13% feeling they were significantly underfunded.

Across the North of England, the overwhelming majority of the public feel their area does not get its fair share of spending **UK IN A CHANGING EUROPE**
Would you say that your local area gets more or less than its fair share of government spending?

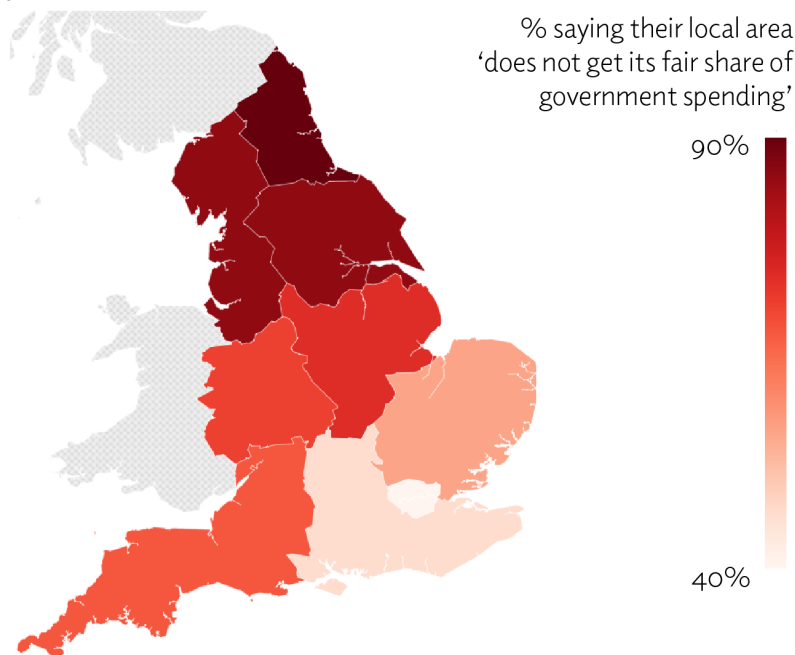


Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20834

The further from London you get, the greater the share of people that feel their area gets a bad deal

Would you say that your local area gets more or less than its fair share of government spending? % by English region

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Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20834

This finding was reflected in our focus groups. Respondents thought the gap between London and other areas was noticeable and the standard of living was often hugely different from other areas in the country. While this wasn't always resented, it was identified as a point of interest.

When you go down south...you can start counting the Aston Martins as soon as you get past the Watford Gap

Nottingham, Male, Group 2

There was also a sense amongst participants that politicians are too focused on London and the South East, to the exclusion of all other areas. This unwillingness to engage with places outside the capital meant that politicians did not understand what these areas needed, and what they could do to help. Of note here is that participants thought this to be true of their own local MP, as well as politicians generally.

I don't feel that national governments are able to associate with places like Nottinghamshire or understand how our issues are. I think they forget past London and its boroughs

Nottingham, Male, Group 1

There were some, however, who acknowledged the number of problems that London faces and who thought that, as a result, it deserves the additional funding it gets. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was participants in Barking who typically tended to feel this way: they saw the problems caused by poverty, the high cost of living, a lack of affordable housing and the pressure on public services on a daily basis. In contrast to respondents in other parts of England, which made intraregional comparisons, respondents in Barking spoke about how extreme poverty and wealth were juxtaposed in the capital, making inequality all the more jarring.

I know a lot of people that I speak to that aren't from London say 'But London gets the most money, you get more than everywhere else'. But there's a lot of big issues that they're still not dealing with

Barking, Female, Group 2

INTRA-REGIONAL COMPARISONS

While the key objective of the Levelling Up Fund is to reduce regional inequality, the focus groups revealed that people think about this on multiple levels. As above, regional inequality was primarily viewed through a comparison of the local region with London (and the South East more broadly). However, comparisons were also made with other towns and cities within the same region. To illustrate, participants in Barnsley would draw comparisons with Leeds, Sheffield and Wakefield and to a lesser extent York and Harrogate. Likewise, people in Nottingham would look towards Derby, Leicester and Birmingham, while those in Blyth spoke about Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland.

Indeed, the local regional inequalities that participants identified were often a more contentious topic in the discussions than comparisons to London. There was real anger and frustration about this: participants felt that their areas were as deserving as others in the region and resented that where they lived was falling behind in comparison due to a lack of investment.

I think Blyth has got left behind. All along the coast, like Tynemouth, they've had a lot of investment. Cramlington has had a lot of investment. We've been left, stuck, and everyone around us has got better

Blyth, Female, Group 2

Participants in some groups expressed frustration not just with the lack of national attention to their local area, but with local leaders. For example, respondents in Barnsley discussed how their recent bids for funding had been unsuccessful, whereas some in Nottingham thought that local authorities could not manage the funding properly. This, they noted, was in comparison with other

places in the region which had been awarded money. They placed responsibility with the local authority for being unable to develop a sufficiently compelling pitch.

Recently Sheffield Council got £30 million, Rotherham Council got £20 million, Doncaster got £19 million. Barnsley asked for about £30 million of funding from central government and didn't get it. So that's the problem

Barnsley, Male, Group 2

With the levelling up funds and the initiative who's going to be in control of it? Because if it's Nottingham City Council they might as well flush it down the toilet

Nottingham, Male, Group 2

Most frustration, however, was reserved for the metro mayors. Their high profile — particularly that of Andy Burnham — was thought to have contributed to regional inequalities, in that it enabled them to lobby effectively for increased funding, which came at the expense of neighbouring areas, furthering intra-regional inequalities.

I am sick to death of money being put into metro areas. So, it always goes to Manchester but what about Burnley and Rochdale and Bolton and all. They get left to become complete shitholes because everything goes into the centre. It's the same in Newcastle... Newcastle gets everything spent on it. Sunderland loses and all the outlying areas, they lose, but Newcastle is buzzing

Nottingham, Male, Group 2

Andy Burnham, the Manchester Mayor and the Liverpoolian guy — Steve somebody — they've got together for the north west but they haven't included the mayor here and Preston. They should all be involved in it for the North West and hammer it out with the government but they're just looking after Manchester and Liverpool. What I'm saying is that they should all be getting together and saying 'Look, we're the North West'

Blackpool, Male, Group 1

CIVIC PRIDE

CIVIC PRIDE

SUMMARY

People are proud of their local areas: Across England, three in four people feel at least ‘quite’ proud of the area where they live, and fewer than one in ten feel no pride at all.

The local matters: We see much more variation in levels of local pride when we compare the types of neighbourhood people live in; this suggests we need to use a super local lens when considering variation in pride across England, beyond regional or even local authority level.

Feeling ‘settled’, both personally and where you live, is important to local pride: At the individual level, the greatest variation in levels of local pride is across age groups and between those who are financially comfortable and those who are more insecure.

People tend to agree on the things that are important to pride: Features such as parks and green spaces, the people who live in an area, local businesses and the high street are all deemed to be most important to generating pride, across all groups in our survey.

Albeit with local particularities: Though our survey suggests that key features of heritage may be less important to local pride, the focus groups show that there is some nuance in this relationship. Some people think industrial heritage has had a key influence on their local community, whereas others derive a deal of pride from sporting success and local landmarks.

HOW DO PEOPLE FEEL ABOUT WHERE THEY LIVE?

The Government has placed local pride at the centre of its levelling up agenda. The [‘Levelling up and regeneration’](#) paper, published in May 2022, states that one of the four objectives of levelling up is to ‘restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost’.

Yet, while people can articulate things they would like to see improved in their areas (and things they perceived to be in need of improvement — See [section 4](#)), most of our respondents expressed pride in their local areas and were more likely to highlight the positives than the negatives when asked to tell us how they feel about where they live, using up to three key words.

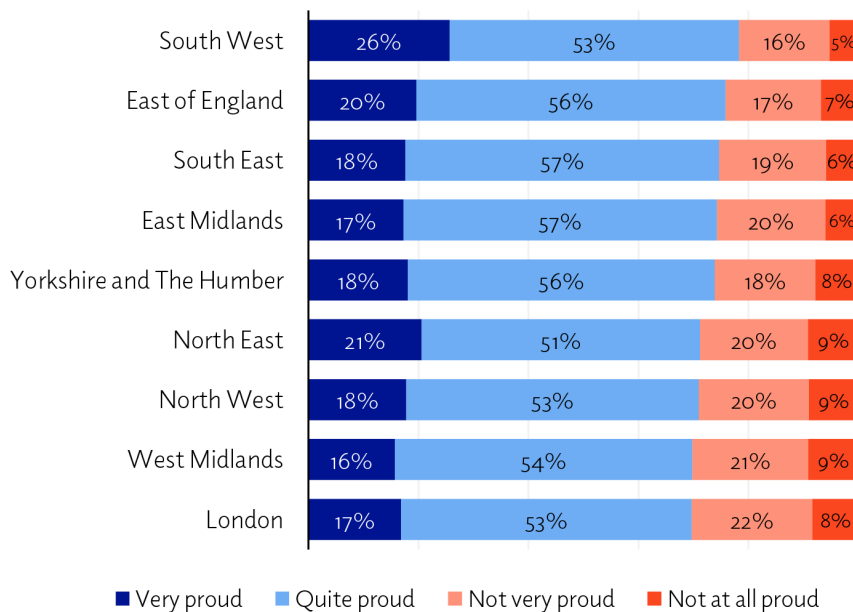
WHO IS MOST PROUD OF THEIR LOCAL AREA?

While there is no evidence of a widespread lack of local pride across England as a whole, there is an implicit (indeed at times [explicit](#)) assumption that places in need of levelling up have less pride. If this were the case, we would expect to see variations across different types of area and among different demographic groups.

However, our data suggests that differences between the regions are small and do not correspond to a simple ‘north vs south’ divide. The region with the highest proportion of respondents that are ‘very proud’ is the South West (26%), while the West Midlands has the lowest proportion (16%). Indeed, there are more similarities than differences between regions: seven in 10 people are at least ‘quite proud’ their locality, irrespective of region.

Across all regions of England, the public are proud of their local area

How proud, or not, are you of the area you live in?



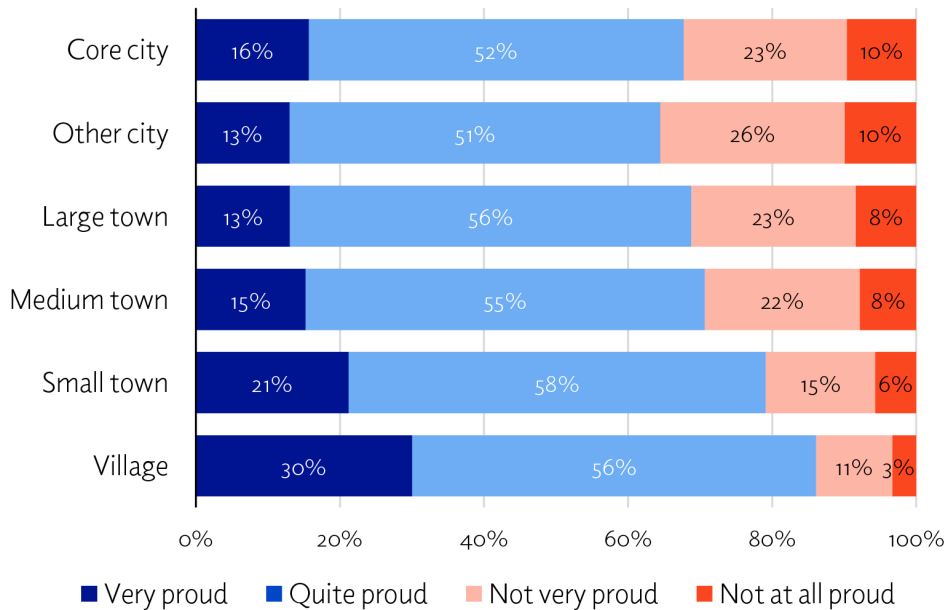
Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 20835

Levelling up has also been linked to certain types of places. There has been a particular focus on towns, seen by some as the core type of ‘left-behind’ place. Our data allowed us to explore this theory and look at different types of ‘places’ across England (see [Annex: Geographies](#) for more information) to explore whether levels of pride in local areas varied according to the type of places people live.

When you drill down into the type of settlement respondents live in, some small differences emerge. While 86 per cent of those who live in a village are at least ‘quite’ proud of their local area, the same is true for under seven in ten of those in large towns or cities.

Those who live in villages are more likely to feel proud of their area than people living in towns or cities

How proud, or not, are you of the area you live in?



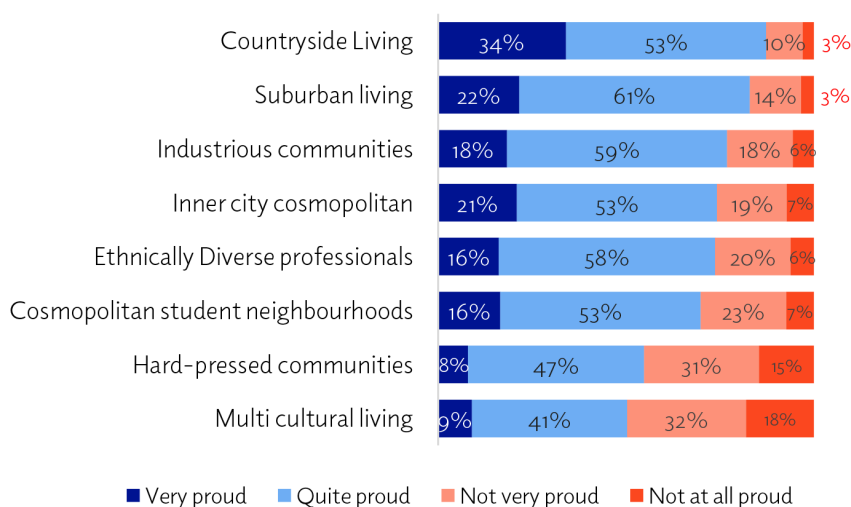
Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov, Fieldwork 19 April - 1 May, n 20835

Regions, constituencies, and towns have dominated the narrative of levelling up thus far. However, there has been less research into the influence of the more immediate neighbourhoods where people live. To consider this, we use [data](#) from the Office for National Statistics, which breaks down England into very small geographic units of around 1500 people.

Each of these units is assigned one of eight categories, based on its demographic and socio-economic profile. More information on the characteristics of these groups, and how they are defined, can be found in the [Annex: Geographies](#).

Those living in more rural and suburban areas of England are more likely to be proud of where they live

How proud, or not, are you of the area you live in?



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N 19256. Don't know responses excluded.

There is far greater variation in pride across these very local neighbourhoods than across regions or types of places. Two groups stand out as having significantly lower levels of local pride and as particularly unlikely to identify as 'very proud': those in neighbourhoods classified as 'multi-cultural living' (50%) or as 'Hard-pressed communities' (55%). Residents of these areas are the least likely to feel at least 'quite' proud of their local areas. In contrast, 87% of those in the 'Countryside Living' group are proud of their local area.

While across all geographical groups the proportion of respondents saying they are 'not at all proud' of their local area is very small, for those in the 'multi-cultural living' (18%) and 'hard-pressed communities' (15%) groups, there is a notably greater lack of local pride than for any of the other types of neighbourhoods, or for any of the larger areas (constituency type and region) that we have considered.

This suggests that, when thinking about pride, a very local lens might be most appropriate for understanding the variation across England. This is also reflected in the way that focus group participants made comparisons between different places, focussing both across and within regions (as in the [preceding section](#)).

WHICH PEOPLE HAVE MOST LOCAL PRIDE?

While it may sound like a cliché, it is people who make up places. Our data allows us to compare local pride not just between different areas, but different demographic groups.

In the graph on the next page, we compare levels of local pride by both types of neighbourhood and a range of socio-economic factors: economic security, home ownership, education level, age and household earnings.

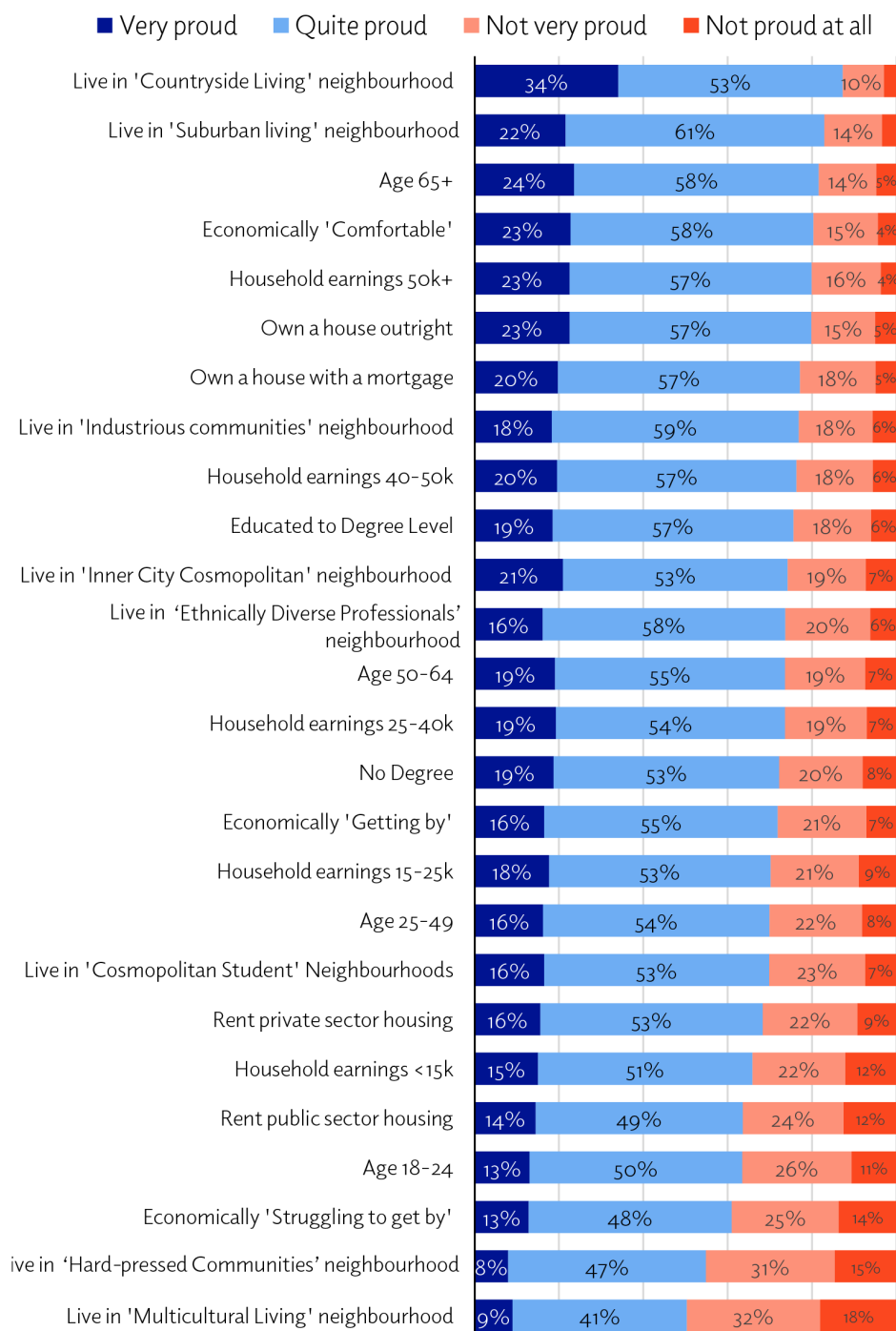
At the individual level, the greatest variation in levels of local pride is across age groups and between those who are financially comfortable and financially insecure. There are also (smaller) differences based on housing tenure. Household income, education and social grade have a much less significant impact on local pride. The type of neighbourhood someone lives in is at least as important as their own socio-economic status (though of course the two are linked in complex ways).

Both the type of neighbourhood you live in and your socio-economic status impact on your level of local pride

How proud, or not, are you of the area you live in?

Analysis by ONS neighbourhoods and socio-economic factors.

UK IN A
CHANGING
EUROPE



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 19256. Sample size varies by sub-group.

That those living in neighbourhoods which are classified as 'multi-cultural living' are the least proud of their areas is a particularly striking finding.

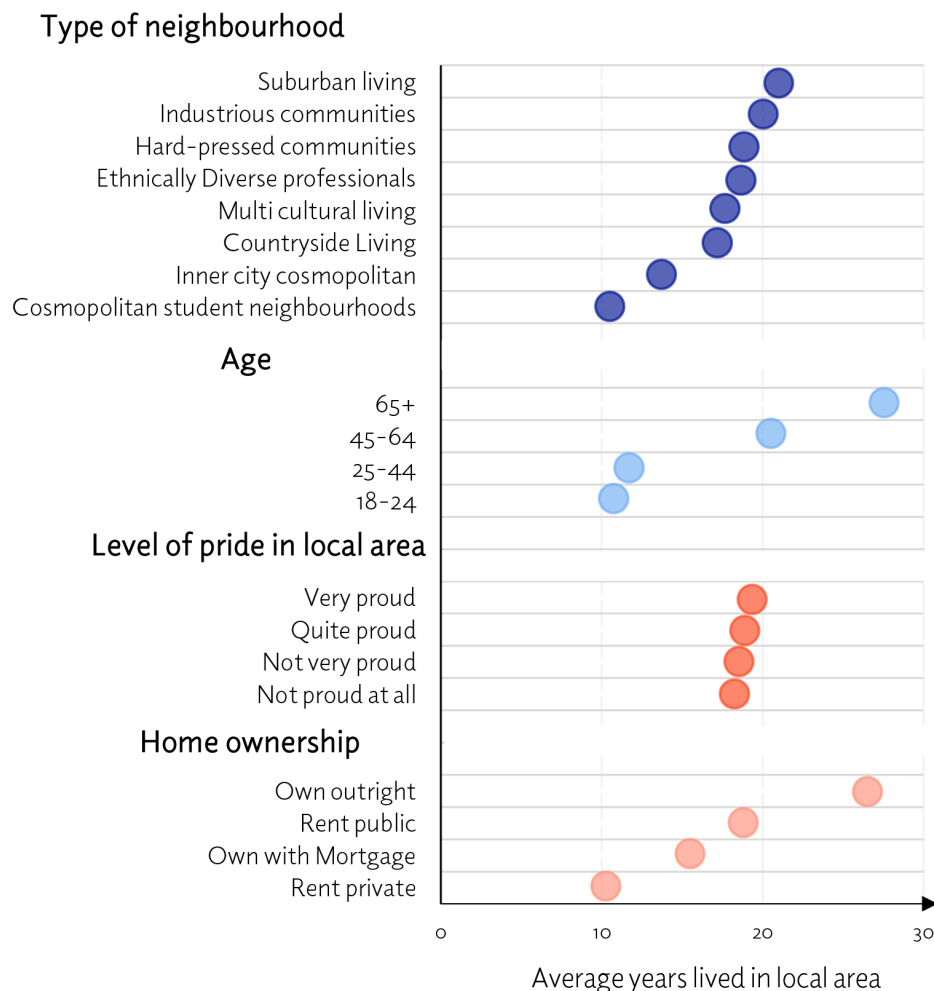
SETTLED LIVING AND LOCAL PRIDE

A person's age, level of financial security and housing status are strongly correlated with levels of local pride. This suggests a relationship between a sense of pride in local areas, and people's stage in life and their financial resources. We explore this sense of being 'rooted' in an area in two ways — the length of time a person has lived in an area, and whether they have a desire to move elsewhere.

We first asked people how long they had lived in their current local area. As expected, the greatest variation was across age groups and housing tenure. Those aged 65 or over and those who owned their homes outright had on average lived in their local area for more than 25 years, while those who rented in the private sector had on average lived in the local area for under 10 years.

The length of time you have lived in an area does not have a significant effect on how proud you are of it

Average length of time lived in area, by age, home ownership, level of local pride and neighbourhood.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n = 20835.

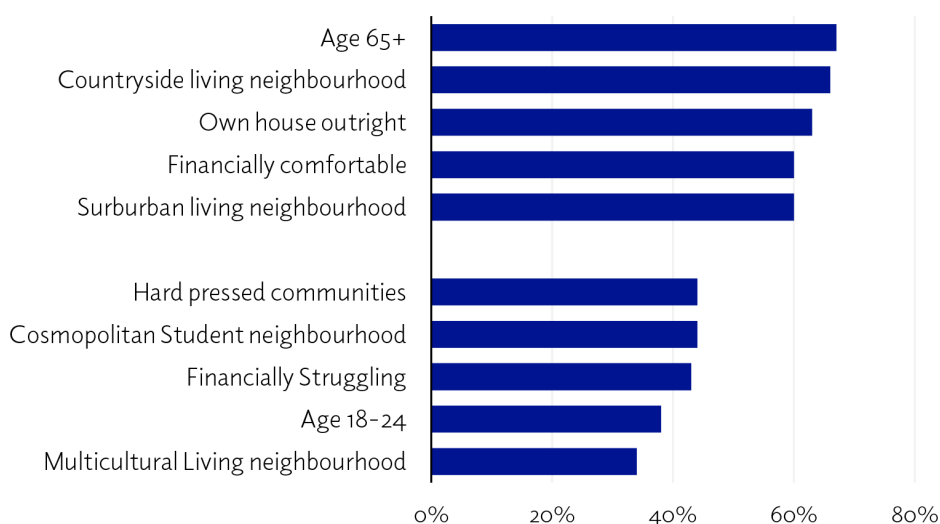
If someone is older, in other words, they are more likely to have lived in an area for longer and to be proud of it. If someone owns their home outright, they are more likely to be proud of their area and to have lived there for longer. Yet, we find surprisingly little relationship between how long a person had lived in the local area and their levels of local pride — age and homeownership seem to be the key variables here.

While time living in an area was not strongly connected to local pride, a desire to live elsewhere was. Those who wanted to move felt less pride in their local areas than those who did not. A key factor here was age. Just 38% of the youngest age group surveyed want to stay where they are, compared with 67% of those aged over 65. This suggests that the question also captures differences in life course between those who are more settled in their community, and those just beginning to put down roots in particular places.

But again we see the influence of the type of local area people live in: just 34% of those currently living in a neighbourhood classified by the ONS as ‘multi-cultural living’ would like to remain where they are, compared with 66% of those in ‘countryside living’ areas.

If you are younger and less financially secure you are more likely to want to move from your local area

If you could choose, would you stay in the area you live in or would you prefer to move somewhere else? % who would choose to stay



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n = 20835.

Despite the striking similarity between the groups that have the highest local pride and those who most want to stay in their local areas, it is impossible to disentangle cause and effect. It could be that people are less likely to form an attachment to an area that they see as a temporary location, or it could be that people want to move because they are not proud of where they live.

The sense of a 'stake' in a local community has been [highlighted](#) by others as important for understanding local pride. It suggests that policies aimed at increasing a sense of connection with an area should consider the factors that lead to population turnover in areas, not least the influence of local housing markets. Indeed, in the focus groups we conducted across the country, a lack of affordable housing was mentioned in all meetings, though it was thought to be most pressing in Barking. The issue here, respondents thought, was that it priced residents out of the area, severing ties and lessening the sense of community:

The problem is that the houses aren't affordable. There's this big plot of land that's been sold in Upminster — and Upminster wouldn't be the most affordable place for a lot of people anyway — but they're building 13 mansion sized houses on it. There's not a single affordable one and part of all the planning permission is supposed to include some affordable housing

Barking, Male, Group 2

Though in other areas, such as Blackpool, a surplus of housing stock meant that people were often rehomed in the area:

Other towns and cities are sending people to Blackpool because they can't house them where they are. So they send them to Blackpool to get housed and we end up with all the trash and rubbish

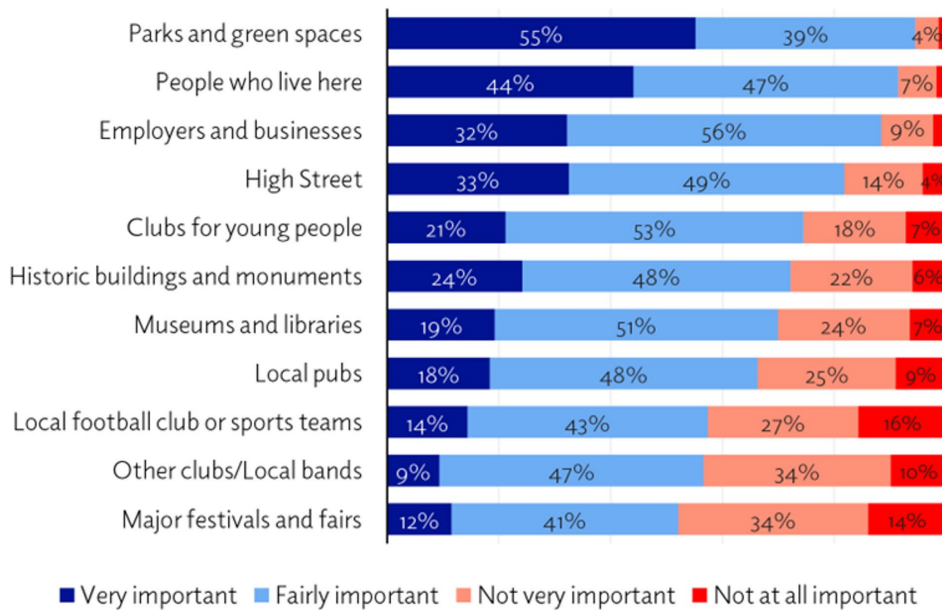
Blackpool, Male, Group 2

WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR LOCAL PRIDE?

We presented respondents with a list of features and asked how important each was in creating a sense of local pride. Most people saw all of them as either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important. However, there were some that were seen by a large proportion of people as being particularly important.

More than nine in 10 people say that local parks and green spaces are important in creating a sense of local pride

In your opinion, to what extent is each of the following important for creating a sense of pride in your area?



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022, n 19618. Don't know responses excluded.

Parks and green spaces were judged by 94% of those who answered the question to be either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important to local pride. Another consistently important factor was the people who live in an area (91%). This was reflected in our focus groups: the people who lived in an area were considered to be in some sense unique, and important to fostering a sense of community. In Barnsley, participants spoke of people being friendly and down to earth. In Barking, residents were described as straight talking. In Blackpool, people were seen as tenacious, and in Blyth resilient.

Barnsley's not just a place, it's a state of mind. That's how it feels sometimes. It really does. That you could take the person out of Barnsley, but you could never take Barnsley out of the person.

Barnsley, Male, Group 2

Other factors deemed to be important, such as employers and businesses (88%) and the local high street (82%), were also raised in the focus groups (see below). Interestingly, although all the factors we presented were judged to be relatively important to local pride, certain cultural and heritage features were seen as less important.

There were very few significant differences according to demographic or geographic groupings, with all groups rating parks and green spaces, the people who live here, employers and businesses, the high street as the most important to local pride.

These findings were strongly reflected in the focus groups. As in our survey, green spaces and areas of natural beauty were identified as important parts of respondents' local communities — including by those that lived in densely populated urban areas. Participants spoke about the importance of having somewhere to go where they could appreciate nature, escape the stresses of daily life, and that could be used by everyone in the community.

The Port of Blyth is somewhere we like to go for a walk that's away from the crowds...it's quite nice and quiet and you can see dolphins. ...It's one of our spots to go if you want somewhere a bit more peaceful, away from the hustle and bustle.

Blyth, Female, Group 1

The park makes me proud because it's actually really nice to walk through there, especially on a summer's day and you've got the ducks opposite you. You see a lot of people like young people, old people, all that kind of thing gathering in there — it's a really nice park

Barking, Female, Group 1

You've got so many beauty spots around here that just aren't know about... the local surrounding area is beautiful. There are places to go that you can take advantage of, sit quietly, peacefully, enjoy the scenery, get out and about

Blackpool, Female, Group 2

However, while the survey results suggested that key features of heritage, such as museums and historic buildings were seen as less important for local pride, the focus groups revealed greater complexity. For some, when they thought about their area's heritage, they mentioned industry — typically former industrial strengths such as coal mining in Barnsley, textiles in Nottingham and the docks in Blyth. Participants spoke about how these had shaped their local areas in terms of the character of the people, the landscape and the architecture.

Boots is from Nottingham (...) older people say Raleigh (as in Raleigh Bikes) because there used to be a factory here, the lace industry, Player's cigarettes...

Nottingham, Female, Group 2

For others, their perception of their area's heritage was tied up in local landmarks. Participants mentioned churches, old town halls, stately homes — notable buildings which had, most typically, been preserved for future generations to enjoy. The exception here was in Barking where participants also referenced recent additions to the area such as developments resulting from the 2012 Olympics, but which they felt set them apart from the rest of the city.

St Barnabus' Cathedral is my local church. It's a Pugin which is awesome — having a Pugin right on your doorstep like that. For a long time it was the biggest post-Reformation Catholic building in Britain so it's a really important place

Nottingham, Female, Group 2

The beach huts. They're a standout feature and you see loads of people taking photographs of them which appear on social media. It brings a positive part of the area into the public domain.

Blyth, Male, Group 2

More broadly, sport — and sporting success in particular — was identified by many as a source of local pride (and, of course, heartbreak). The success of local teams gave them something to cheer about and raised the profile of the area. Sport also fed into ideas of heritage and tradition. People in Nottingham, for instance, spoke about how they saw their city as having a long sporting legacy with the recent promotion of Nottingham Forest to the Premier League. Sport, and an affiliation to local teams, also helped people form a sense of identity; both who they are and what they stand for — but also what they are not.

Nottingham is home to Nottingham Forest and the cricket ground. I always think that Nottingham, well, it's a sporting city. The football and the cricket and the ice hockey and the Panthers and it's Torvill and Dean isn't it?

Nottingham, Male, Group 2

The focus groups reveal some nuance in how people think about the different factors that determine levels of local pride. However, perhaps the most striking feature across both the survey and the focus groups was the level of general agreement about what fosters pride in local areas, regardless of age, political affiliation, or location.



CHANGING PLACES: WHAT HAS GOT BETTER AND WORSE OVER THE LAST DECADE?

CHANGING PLACES: WHAT HAS GOT BETTER AND WORSE OVER THE LAST DECADE?

SUMMARY

People across England believe that their area has less opportunities for young people and fewer good jobs than other parts of the country, regardless of where they live.

People's neighbourhoods — and the social and economic characteristics associated with them — have a big impact on how people think about other parts of England. For example, those living in 'inner city cosmopolitan' areas, often in London, are the only group who believe they have better opportunities and more good jobs than other parts of the country. Meanwhile, those in more rural neighbourhoods are much more likely to view their area as having less crime than other parts of England.

Access to affordable public transport and levels of crime are key issues. On average, people think that crime rates and the cost of transport are the things that have worsened most in their local areas in the last decade.

However, again, the characteristics of people's neighbourhoods matter: Though people living in poorer, urban neighbourhoods pinpoint increased rates of crime as a particular issue in their local area, they are also much more likely to describe a general sense of decline. People living in more affluent areas are more easily able to highlight specific parts of their area that have been in decline.

People who are proud of their area are less likely to say it has declined. This suggests that pride and an individual's perception of their local area go hand in hand. Equally, in neighbourhoods where the perception of decline is above average, we find lower levels of local pride.

Local pride helps us understand how attached people feel to their area and has been a cornerstone in thinking about levelling up. However, it is the reduction of inequality between different areas, and critically between different types of area, that is its ultimate objective.

A key question then is how people think their areas compare with others, and whether their area has been improving or not. While respondents clearly felt affection for their local areas, they pointed to comparisons (both favourable and unfavourable) to other places and were able to point to aspects of their locality that they perceived as being in decline.

HOW DO PEOPLE THINK THEIR AREAS COMPARE WITH OTHERS?

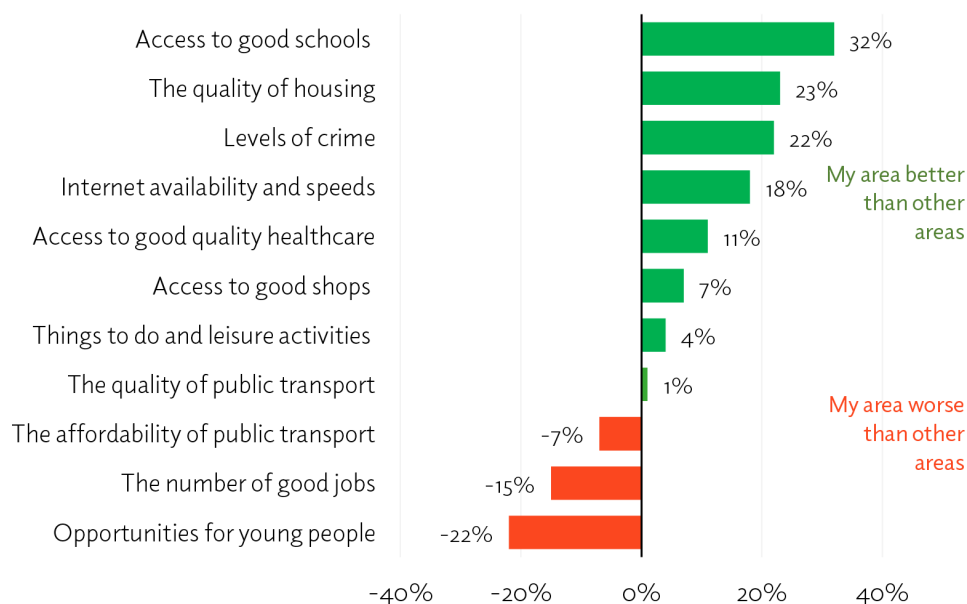
We began by asking our respondents to think about whether their area was better or worse than other parts of England on average across the following areas:

- The number of good jobs
- Opportunities for young people
- Quality of housing
- Access to good schools
- Access to good quality healthcare
- Quality of public transport
- Affordability of public transport
- Levels of crime
- Access to good shops
- Internet speed and availability
- Things to do and leisure activities

Respondents answered on a five-point scale: 'Better than nearly all other areas', 'Better than most other areas', 'About average', 'Worse than most other areas' and 'Worse than nearly all other areas'. To capture the general sense of how an area is perceived, we create a 'net' measure which subtracts the proportion of people saying their area was worse than others from the proportion saying it was better. A negative number indicates that on average people viewed their area as worse than other areas, whereas a positive number indicates people thought their areas were better.

People generally feel their local area has better schools, lower crime and better healthcare than other areas of England

How would you say the area where you live compares with other areas on the following measures?



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20835

Across England, people are most likely to feel their area is lagging behind other parts of the country when it comes to opportunities for young people and the number of good jobs. Yet on most other features, most people feel their own area performs relatively well in comparison to other parts of the country. In terms of access to good schools, the quality of housing and levels of crime, most people feel their area is better than others.

This may reflect the sense of pride in the area, as outlined in [section two](#). Equally, it may be driven by the exposure people have to other areas of the country, which can often be through negative news coverage (for example in perceptions of levels of crime).

As with local pride, we find that there are relatively few differences at the regional level. Instead, it is more local neighbourhood experiences which seem to have a greater impact on how people view their areas in comparison with others.

In most types of neighbourhood in England, people feel their area has worse opportunities for young people, but better schools, than average

How would you say the area where you live compares with other areas on the following measures?

	Cosmopolitan Student Neighbourhood	Countryside Living	Ethnically Diverse professionals	Hard-pressed communities	Industrious communities	Inner city cosmopolitan	Multicultural living	Suburban living
Opportunities for young people	2%	-50%	-1%	-34%	-33%	20%	-21%	-17%
Availability of good jobs	-1%	-35%	6%	-31%	-26%	21%	-14%	-9%
Affordability of public transport	2%	-31%	-4%	-5%	-12%	21%	7%	-9%
Things to do and leisure activities	30%	-8%	13%	-12%	-2%	37%	-8%	7%
Quality of public transport	23%	-48%	15%	2%	-11%	60%	25%	-7%
Access to good quality healthcare	16%	10%	20%	-1%	6%	26%	3%	14%
Access to good shops	37%	-28%	21%	5%	-1%	40%	13%	10%
Levels of crime	9%	66%	25%	-12%	28%	-7%	-24%	38%
Quality of housing	9%	40%	33%	-5%	21%	16%	-7%	44%
Internet availability and speeds	25%	-8%	28%	19%	13%	35%	24%	23%
Access to good schools	29%	32%	44%	10%	28%	33%	14%	46%



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20834

Those living in 'inner city cosmopolitan' neighbourhoods (primarily in London) are the only group with a substantial positive net score when it comes to opportunities for young people and the number of good jobs. Conversely those in 'countryside living' neighbourhoods are the most negative when it comes to opportunities for young people, but most positive when it comes to levels of crime. Those living in these more rural neighbourhoods were notable for more polarised views of their areas, seeing them as very clearly better than average on some factors such as levels of crime, but worse on others, such as opportunities for young people, public transport and the number of good jobs.

In contrast, those living in 'hard-pressed communities' and 'industrious communities' did not rate their areas as performing particularly well on any characteristics. However, they were likely to see their area as worse than average when it comes to opportunities for young people, levels of crime and the availability of jobs. Meanwhile, those living in 'multicultural living' neighbourhoods were especially likely to see their area as worse than others when it comes to crime.

While it is important not to overstate these differences, they do highlight how local areas and spaces are used and experienced differently by different groups of people across England.

ARE AREAS IN DECLINE?

As we saw, most people feel positively towards their local areas. However, people did highlight where they thought their areas had declined in more recent times. Using the same list of characteristics as above, we asked people to say whether they felt their local areas had improved or worsened over the last decade.

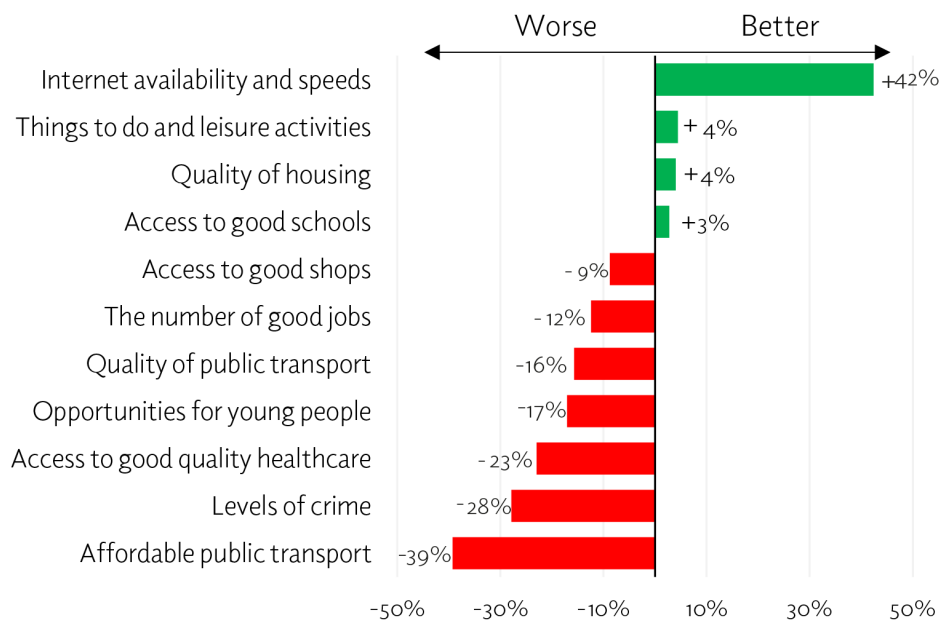
On some issues, the consensus was that their areas had been in a steady state over the last decade, most notably when it came to access to good schools and quality of housing — perhaps reflecting the length of time it takes for change to occur.

There are, however, some key differences between how people viewed their areas in comparison with others in England, and how they viewed the trajectory of their area over the last ten years. While on average people thought their areas were better than most others in terms of levels of crime, they nonetheless thought this was an something that had worsened in their community over the last decade. This is also the case with access to good quality healthcare.

People feel public transport, crime & access to healthcare have deteriorated where they live over the last decade

Would you say your area has got better, worse, or stayed the same in terms of the following measures over the past 10 years?

**UK IN A
CHANGING
EUROPE**



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 19618

In our focus groups, complaints centred around the limited opportunities for well-paid work that, in turn, meant people left the area — typically for the South East — as well as poor transport links, crime and gangs (frequently put down to low police numbers) and a lack of resources and activities for young people.

The dearth of job opportunities was a particular issue in Barnsley and Blyth, where participants contrasted today's job market with the thriving industries of yesteryear. While they recognised that jobs like mining or ship building were not always appealing, they were thought to pay well, bring security, foster community and tapped into ideas about tradition and heritage. The real issue though, was that these industries have not been replaced by anything else, creating cycles of generational poverty which had not been addressed.

When a big employer leaves an area, it leaves desolation behind. We're coming back from it — I'm sure we are — but areas that have varied employment don't suffer as much. Steelworks, mining...it all went and it leaves a big hole doesn't it?

Barnsley, Male, Group 1

When we had industry most people did an apprenticeship and they learnt a trade and they were set for life. But that industry is gone and there's no real opportunities for young people.

Barnsley, Male, Group 2

Relatedly, all participants bemoaned the lack of skilled jobs in their area, underlining that, typically, available work was often in the service sector — low skilled, low paid, and insecure (there was much talk of zero-hours contracts in particular). Crucially, the resulting economic precarity meant people were unable to put down roots or plan for the future.

It's so competitive...and then you're getting zero-hours contracts. You don't want a job like that, you want stability

Barking, Female, Group 1

Certain sectors — notably the creative sector and high-tech industries — were thought to be concentrated in the South of England, meaning that if people wanted a job in these sectors, then there was no choice but to move. This resulted in a brain drain with young, educated people leaving where they had grown up and not returning. While participants thought people should move from the area if they wanted to, they felt it unfair that, for some, it was compulsory.

There's a very big brain drain problem. Anybody who wants to get into those industries or jobs tends to go down south.

Barnsley, Male, Group 2

People who train and want to get into the arts or creative sector leave and go somewhere else. Probably even further afield than South Yorkshire

Barnsley, Female, Group 2

In many of the groups, the local economy was thought to be hindered by the lack of available transport links. This was particularly the case in more rural areas. One local resident described Blyth as ‘the very end of the line,’ adding they felt cut off from the rest of the region. This was seen as hindering investment — without transport, respondents could not see how industry could develop there.

There’s no transport links. It’s difficult to get to other places. You have generation after generation stuck in the same cycle of poverty, boredom, drugs, no job. Until they put more parts on the map in terms of the North East, I think it’s just going to keep happening over and over again

Blyth, Female, Group 2

VARIATIONS ACROSS NEIGHBOURHOODS IN ENGLAND

Comparisons between localities showed particularly large differences in how people think about their local areas. The same is true when we look at how people view the trajectory of their area.

Across different types of neighbourhood in England, people feel that the provision of affordable public transport has got worse



Would you say your area has got better, worse, or stayed the same in terms of the following measures over the past 10 years? % saying ‘has got worse in their area’.

	Cosmopolitan Student Neighbourhood	Countryside Living	Ethnically Diverse professionals	Hard-pressed communities	Industrious communities	Inner city cosmopolitan	Multicultural living	Suburban living
Affordability of public transport	48%	45%	48%	46%	47%	46%	43%	46%
Access to good quality healthcare	34%	33%	33%	34%	37%	27%	34%	38%
Levels of crime	43%	23%	40%	46%	37%	43%	53%	35%
Quality of public transport	29%	41%	27%	31%	36%	14%	23%	34%
Access to good shops	29%	27%	32%	34%	34%	20%	30%	32%
Opportunities for young people	29%	28%	26%	39%	35%	26%	35%	27%
Availability of good jobs	28%	23%	21%	36%	31%	22%	31%	24%
Things to do and leisure activities	19%	14%	19%	27%	20%	15%	27%	17%
Quality of housing	28%	13%	16%	23%	17%	27%	31%	13%
Access to good schools	14%	11%	12%	16%	13%	14%	19%	12%
Internet availability and speeds	9%	9%	7%	8%	7%	9%	10%	6%



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20834

There are aspects characterised by widespread agreement that across all kinds of neighbourhood, there has been a decline. The affordability of public transport stands out as a key issue. Crime levels are perceived as worsening by more than four in 10 people across those living in ‘cosmopolitan student’, ‘ethnically diverse professional’, ‘hard-pressed communities’, ‘inner city cosmopolitan’, and ‘multi-cultural living’ neighbourhoods.

However, two types of neighbourhoods — ‘hard-pressed communities’ and ‘multi-cultural living’ groups — stood out from this overall pattern. Rather than citing the affordability of transport as the issue that had worsened most, they were much more likely to point to crime levels. Respondents were also much more likely to say that their area was in decline across a broad range of issues than any of the other neighbourhood groups.

This suggests that, while in some areas there is a perception of general decline across a wide array of factors over the last decade, residents of other neighbourhoods are much more likely to pinpoint specific issues. Focussing in on two of our neighbourhood types allows us to illustrate this. Below we have plotted the proportion in three neighbourhood types who said their area had worsened for a particular characteristic (the red line) and compare this with responses from across England (the grey line).

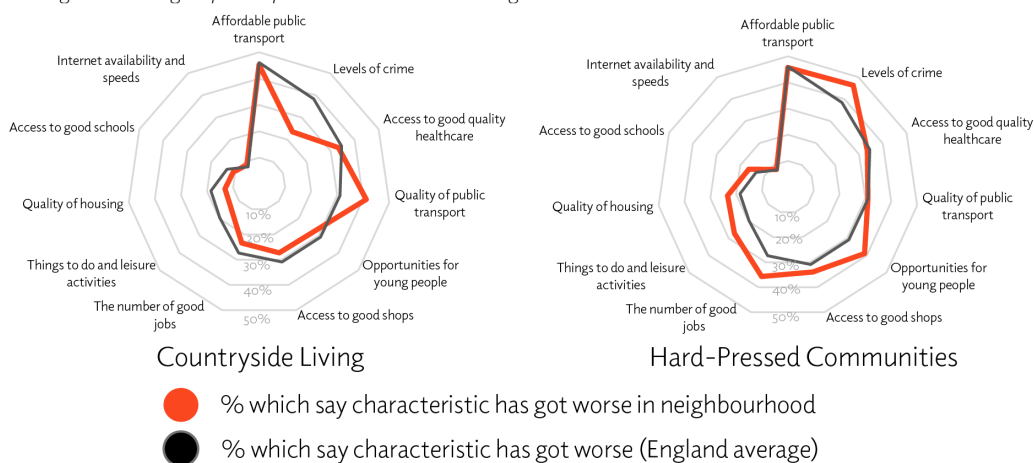
Interestingly, these profiles appear related to overall levels of pride. For the group with the highest levels of pride — the ‘countryside living’ neighbourhoods — we find that respondents are less likely than average to say that their area has declined in any way, apart from when it comes to the quality of public transport.

It is notable that for levels of crime, good jobs and opportunities for young people, the red line is within the grey line, indicating that the countryside living group are less likely than people in England on average to perceive crime levels, job opportunities and opportunities for young people in their area as having worsened over the last ten years.

People in hard pressed neighbourhoods are more likely to think that their local area has got worse in the last decade than people in the rest of England



% that feel their local area has got worse over the last decade, ONS neighbourhood groups compared to the national average.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20835

In contrast, those living in ‘hard-pressed communities’ were more likely to see their area as worse than others. The number of good jobs, opportunities for young people, levels of crime, quality of housing, leisure activities and number of good shops are all more likely to be perceived as worsening in comparison to the average for England.

Interestingly, those neighbourhoods where the perception of decline is above average across multiple issues are those where levels of local pride are lower. This sense of decline therefore seems to be an important factor in the low levels of pride in these areas — though cause and effect are not easily disentangled.



HOW TO IMPROVE LOCAL AREAS

HOW TO IMPROVE LOCAL AREAS

SUMMARY

In looking for ways to improve their areas, people are reluctant to look to the past. Participants do not want former industries to return, but rather new ones to replace what once gave their community a sense of purpose.

People think that action to address the parts of their community that are in decline will most improve their area. For example, the public on average believe that action to reduce crime, and policies to improve access to good quality healthcare — two things they see as having declined over the last decade — will most improve their local communities.

Solutions such as improving access to good shops and the availability of jobs are not the public's top priorities. People tend to prioritise policies within the remit of central government — crime and health — as opposed to those which could be implemented at local level.

The policies which people think would most improve their local area varies according to the type of neighbourhood in which they live. For example, reducing crime is by far the most popular option amongst those living in poorer, more urban areas. On the other hand, those in more rural, more affluent parts of the country prioritise access to healthcare and housing above reducing crime.

Crime — and reducing rates of it — is a key issue. In both our survey data and the focus groups, policies to reduce instances of crime are popular, and linked by respondents to numerous other issues. This includes the availability of opportunities for young people, as well as the quality of and access to housing.

People across England have different perceptions of how their areas have changed — for better or for worse — over the last decade, depending on the type of place they live. Yet we saw widespread agreement in what people felt helped to generate local pride. How do people react when asked what would most improve their areas?

Our focus groups suggested that, when it came to concrete solutions, people found it difficult to articulate a vision of the future. Participants acknowledged

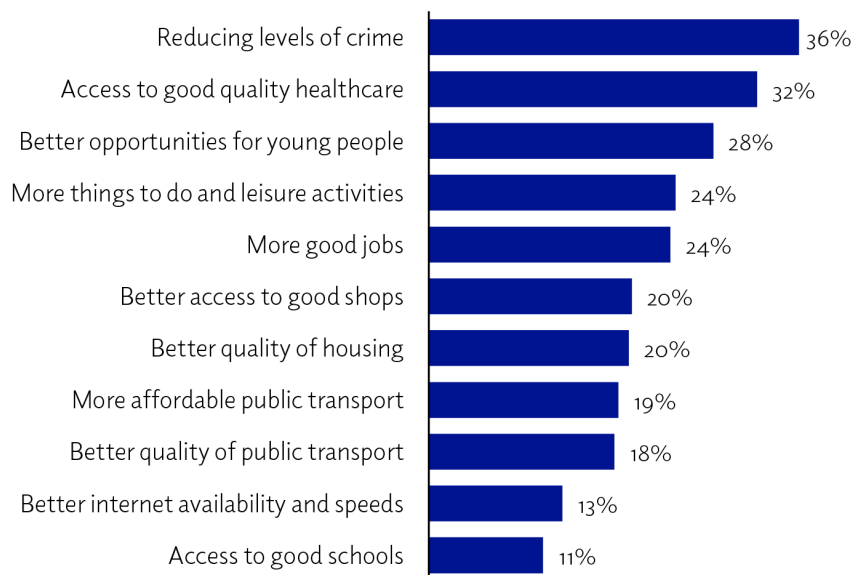
that former industrial giants could not — and indeed should not — be revived: in Barnsley there was no great desire to see coal mining return and in Blackpool participants were happy not to have as many tourists descend on the beachfront each summer. That said, the same participants wanted something to replace the sense of purpose that those former industries had brought them, even if they were not quite sure what this could be. In Blyth, one participant summed this feeling up by stating that the town ‘needed a reason to be here’.

In the survey we made this task somewhat easier for participants by asking them to select the three things (from the same list as above) that they thought would most improve their areas.

If the public could choose one thing to improve their local area, it would be a reduction in the level of crime



Which of the following do you consider most important for improving your area? Please pick up to 3.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20834

Across England as a whole, for the most part, the things thought most likely to improve an area were those thought to be in decline. The most popular choices were reducing crime and improving access to good quality healthcare. However, there were exceptions. While affordability of public transport was widely perceived to have worsened across England, this was less likely to be chosen as a key element for improving the local area.

Perhaps surprisingly, the totemic issues of jobs and shops were some way down the list of priorities, well behind reducing levels of crime and improving access to good quality health care.

This points to a tension between our findings and current levelling up priorities. There is a suggestion here that the things people think would most improve their areas are the responsibility of national government and might be better tackled through a broader project of national renewal of public services than through smaller, targeted schemes for individual local areas.

And again, we see some variation based on neighbourhood. For three of the neighbourhood groups, reducing crime is by far the most commonly chosen factor when it comes to improving the area. Only those in ‘countryside living’ neighbourhoods do not rank reducing crime in their top three. Access to good quality health care is the most commonly chosen factor amongst respondents in this group. It is also within the top three choices for almost all other areas, with the exception of ‘cosmopolitan student neighbourhoods’ and ‘hard-pressed communities’. Other key areas for improvement across all groups are access to housing and opportunities for young people.

Across nearly all types of neighbourhood in England, tackling crime is seen as the key priority for improving the local area



Which of the following do you think is most important for improving your area? Please pick up to three. Analysed by ONS Neighbourhood

	Cosmopolitan Student Neighbourhoods	Countryside Living	Ethnically Diverse Professionals	Hard-pressed Communities	Industrious Communities	Inner City Cosmopolitan	Multicultural Living	Suburban Living
Reducing levels of crime	35%	18%	41%	45%	33%	40%	51%	35%
Access to good quality healthcare	22%	35%	32%	28%	35%	26%	26%	38%
Better opportunities for young people	25%	32%	25%	29%	32%	22%	24%	27%
More good jobs	27%	21%	21%	29%	27%	19%	22%	23%
More things to do and leisure activities	22%	21%	26%	24%	26%	21%	21%	27%
Better quality of housing	32%	11%	20%	26%	16%	37%	29%	11%
Better access to good shops	14%	21%	20%	19%	22%	17%	16%	22%
More affordable public transport	22%	22%	21%	15%	18%	18%	14%	18%
Better quality of public transport	16%	30%	16%	13%	18%	13%	12%	20%
Better internet availability and speeds	11%	26%	12%	8%	12%	14%	7%	13%
Access to good schools	9%	9%	11%	12%	12%	10%	12%	12%



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20835

Across all neighbourhood types, there is a close congruence between the perception of decline and the priorities for improvement. The one exception is public transport. While it is widely felt to have declined in quality and affordability, it does not feature in the top three priorities for improvement, except for those in ‘countryside living’ neighbourhoods.

It is also noteworthy that level of crime does not feature in the top three priorities for those in the countryside living neighbourhoods, who also had the highest levels of local pride. Yet reducing levels of crime is the priority of around half of those in the ‘hard-pressed communities’ and ‘multi-cultural living’ neighbourhoods — the two groups with the lowest levels of local pride.

In the focus groups, participants linked crime and anti-social behaviour with the opportunities for young people in an area. Participants spoke about how youth clubs and sporting facilities had closed down, while schools offered few after-class activities. This, they felt, led to young people being bored which, in turn, resulted in them finding their own forms of entertainment. More seriously, participants living in urban areas discussed how gangs of young people engaged in crime — something that worried them for their own safety, but also raised fears about whether their children would be led astray. This was particularly an issue in Nottingham and London.

I think the gangs nowadays are quite scary to be honest. For me, a mum, I've got a 20-year-old and a 17-year-old and it's quite worrying

Barking, Female, Group 2

Further discussion in the focus groups highlighted how, even where reducing levels of crime was a key priority, it was linked more widely with other key issues. In Blackpool, participants mentioned how in the area a surplus of housing stock was linked to rising crime levels. They articulated how local authorities in areas of high demand now send people to areas like Blackpool in order to be rehoused. Participants saw this as a useful way for other areas to move people with multiple needs or specific issues — with Blackpool suffering as a result.

These findings highlight the competing challenges for policy. Key priorities are broadly shared, though not universally so. A focus on crime reduction is unlikely to meet the challenges confronting rural areas, while for those living in ‘hard pressed communities,’ a focus on housing is likely to be seen as less important. Perhaps the greatest challenge though is that so many of the key challenges are shared — focussed on a shared sense of national decline rather than on the specifics of local delivery.



HOW TO FIX ENGLAND'S HIGH STREETS

HOW TO FIX ENGLAND'S HIGH STREETS

SUMMARY

A majority of respondents believe their local high street has got worse in the last decade. A majority think their high streets are in a state of increasing disrepair, noting empty and boarded up shops and litter.

Some respondents, particular those in inner city cosmopolitan areas, do think their local high streets are improving. Those in areas of London, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh and Manchester, amongst others, note an increasing number of independent shops, wine bars and restaurants.

The most pressing issue for respondents is the loss of retailers from high streets. This is symbolised by boarded up shops, and in particular the closure of bank branches.

Crime is also a pressing issue. A rise in crime is identified by over a quarter of respondents as a reason for their high street getting worse.

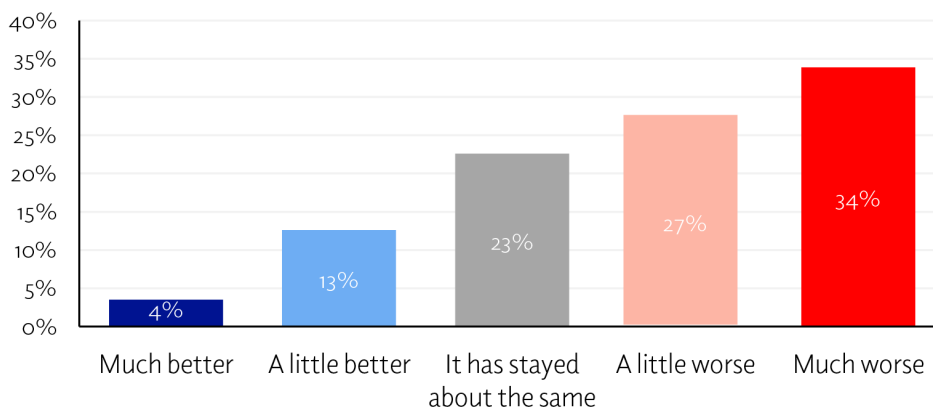
PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH STREETS

High streets have become totemic in the debate over the decline of places across England. Both our survey and focus groups confirm that a way to engender greater pride in a local area is by improving local high streets — albeit this is a lower priority than dealing with more fundamental issues such as levels of crime and quality of healthcare.

Our survey demonstrates a widespread perception that high streets have been in decline. Asked whether their local high street had improved or worsened in the last 10 years, just over 60% said it had got worse, with less than one in five saying it had improved.

Six out of 10 people think the condition of their local high street has got worse over the last decade

Would you say that your local high street has got better or worse in the last ten years?

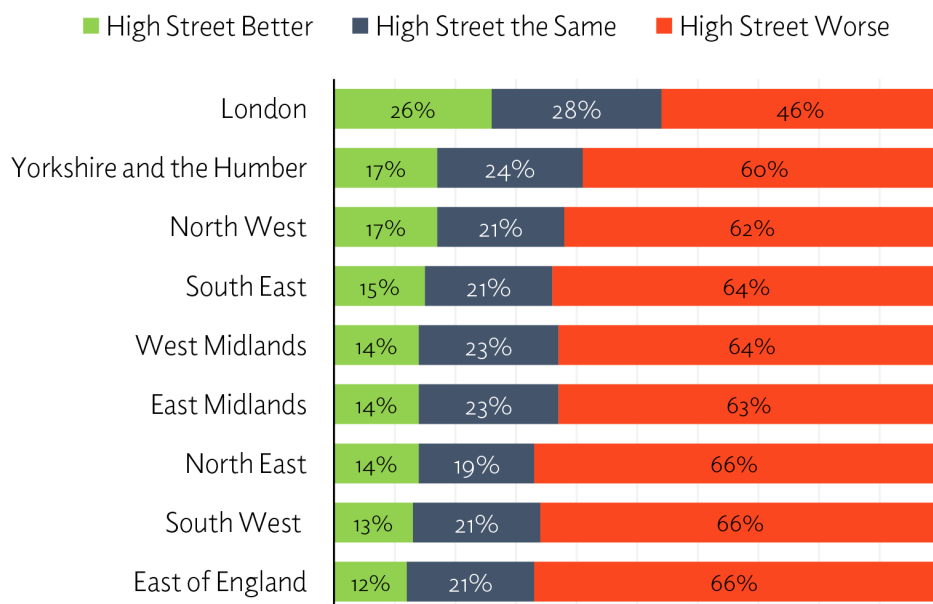


Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n = 20835

London was something of an outlier: just under half of Londoners think that their high street has got worse, whereas this figure was over 60% in every other region of the UK.

Across all areas of England, people feel their high street has got worse over the last decade

Would you say that your high street has got better or worse over the last decade?



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19 April - 1 May. N = 20835

Our focus groups, where the issue was consistently raised, reaffirmed this message. Participants described several common problems including empty and boarded up shops, buildings that had fallen into disrepair and litter on the streets, all of which conveyed the impression that high streets were uncared for and lacked investment. Some female participants also mentioned feeling unsafe at night. High streets felt uninviting and were not places they wanted to spend time.

It's not very inviting and you don't drive down the street thinking 'oh this is a lovely place'. Driving into the town centre, it looks like a really poor run-down area ... all the shop windows are smashed. If I'm on my own at night, I almost feel like I have to lock myself in the car

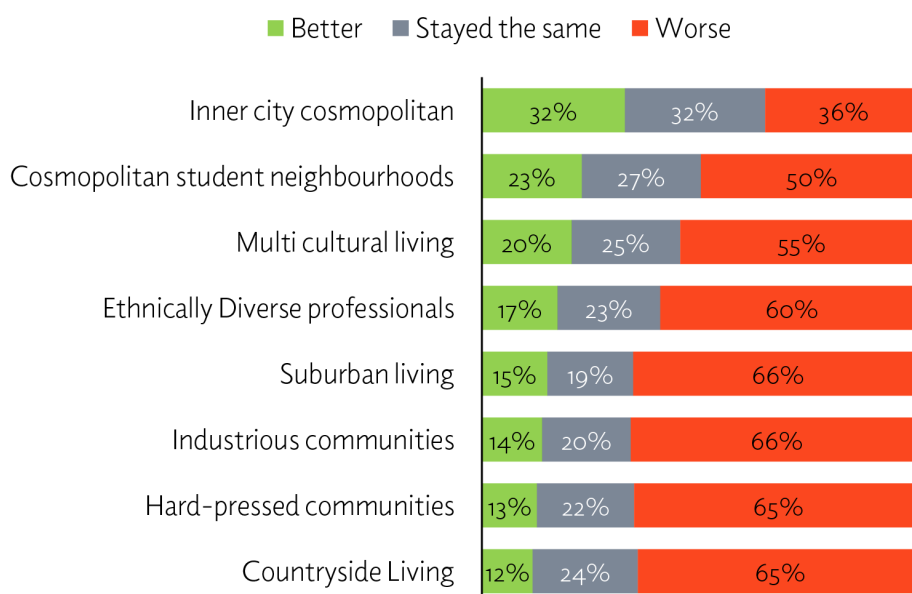
Barnsley, Female, Group 2

Although we see a 'London effect' at the regional level, when comparing responses by neighbourhood type, we can see a similar effect in other 'prosperous' city areas. When we ask those that live in what are called 'inner city cosmopolitan areas' — about 5% of the population concentrated in mainly in Inner London, but also parts of Outer London, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Reading — nearly as many respondents are optimistic as are pessimistic about their high street.

Within our focus groups, Nottingham was also an exception: while participants made the same complaints about the city centre, they did acknowledge that in some of the suburbs, a number of independent shops, wine bars and restaurants had opened which were popular with residents, and which lent the area character.

People in some types of neighbourhood are much more likely to think their high street has declined

Has your high street got better, got worse or stayed about the same over the last ten years?



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n = 20835

However, across other types of neighbourhood there was a shared sense of decline, with around two-thirds of those in ‘countryside-living’, ‘hard-pressed communities’, ‘industrious communities’ and ‘suburban living’ neighbourhoods saying their local high street had worsened in the last decade.

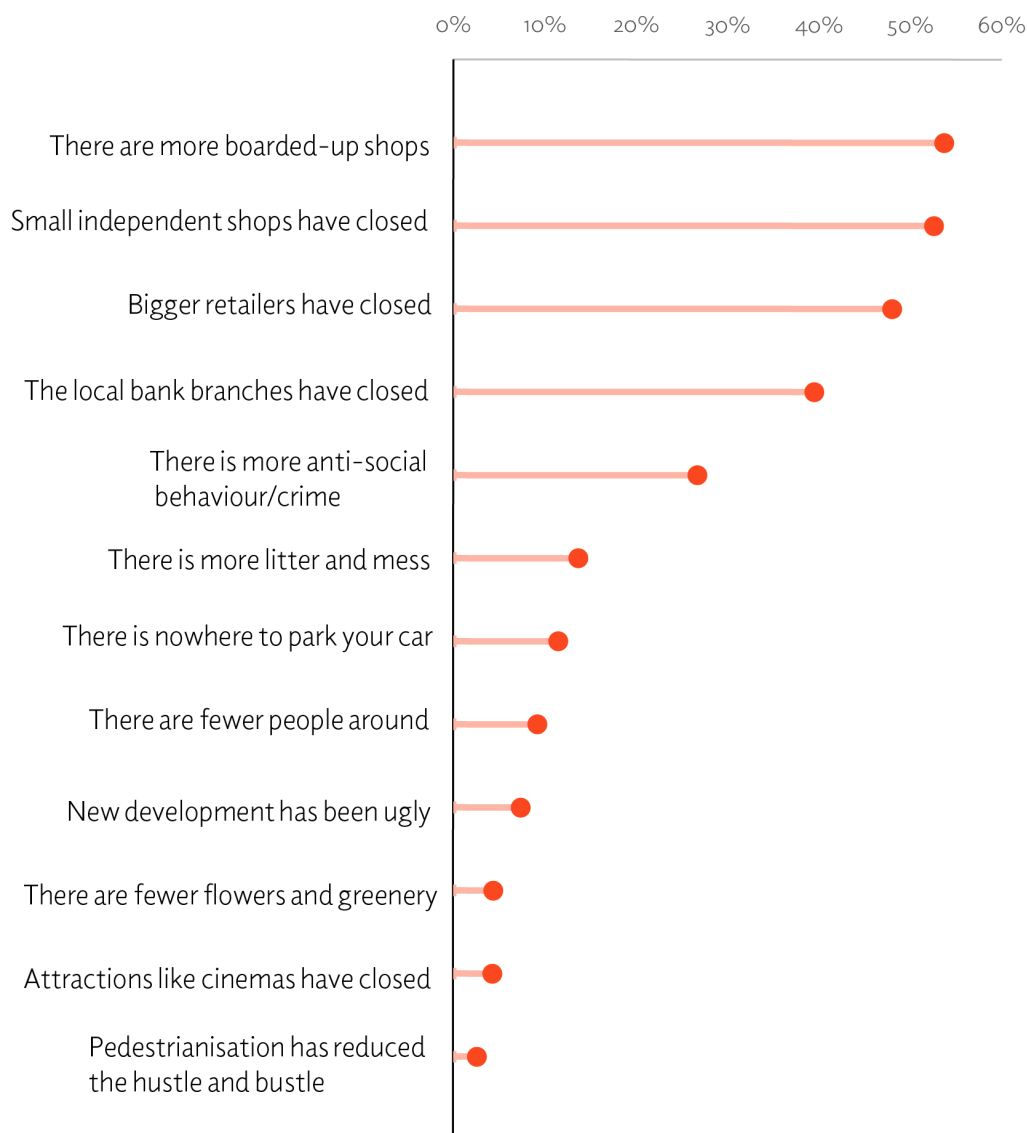
WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO IMPROVE HIGH STREETS?

The question we then posed was ‘why?’ Amongst those who think their high street has got worse over the last decade, what are thought to be the biggest problems? And, for the smaller group who say their high street has got better over the last ten years, what do they think their local area has got right?

People were asked to choose the three most important reasons why their high street had got worse. By far the most common response was related to the loss of retailers from the high street, symbolised by boarded-up shops. The closure of local bank branches was also an important factor here.

People who feel their high street is in decline see boarded up shops and closed retailers as the biggest problem

You said that your nearest high street has got worse over the last 10 years. Which of the following reasons best explains how? Please pick up to three.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 12042 - respondents who said their high street had got worse over the last 10 years.

In our focus groups, participants similarly bemoaned a lack of shops and facilities that they wanted to use. In Barking, participants complained about the lack of high-end retailers meaning they had to go elsewhere to get what they needed, while in Blackpool and Blyth, participants spoke about the high number of bargain stores and betting shops.

I just tend to bypass the town centre altogether. There's just nothing really there — you've got your betting shops, charity shops, that kind of thing. Just nothing that you would go to.

Blythe, Female, Group 1

In Barking and Dagenham there's no high street shops, no high-end retailers. A Starbucks would do in Barking — they haven't even got a Starbucks. I remember my mum telling me if you've got a Marks and Spencer then it's a decent town centre...and we haven't got a Marks and Spencer

Barking, Male, Group 2

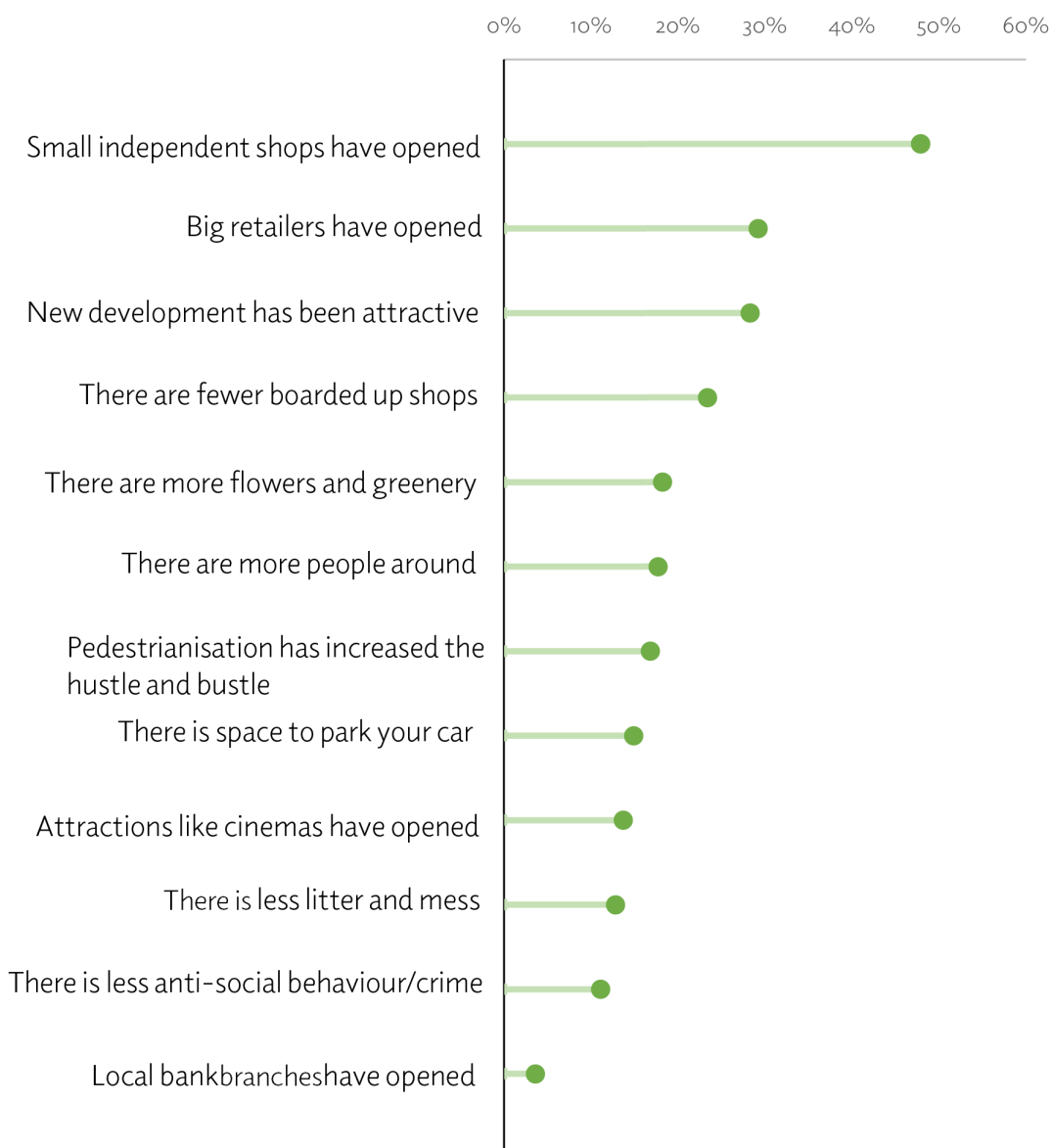
Tackling mass closures therefore remains the key challenge for revitalising high streets. This message was reinforced when we asked the 17% of people in our sample (still 2895 people) who thought their high street had got better why this was the case.

Just as the closing of shops was the biggest indicator of decline, the opening of smaller shops and big retailers were identified as the key reasons why local places had got better.

More small independent shops are the most important change for those who feel their high street has improved



You said that your nearest high street has got better over the last 10 years. Which of the following reasons best explains how? Please pick up to three.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 2895 - respondents who said their high street had improved over the last 10 years.

When comparing the groups who have seen their high street get better and worse, we see some interesting differences. Pedestrianisation is significantly more likely to be identified as a driver of improvement rather than decline in high streets. The prettiness of high streets and the amount of greenery is noticed by 18% of those whose local centres have improved but is not at all a priority in places that have worsened.

Perhaps the biggest difference concerns the rise in crime. Levels of crime were identified by over a quarter (27%) of respondents as a reason for their high street getting worse. Yet a crackdown on crime was rarely identified as a reason why places had got better.

LOCAL PRIDE AND THE HIGH STREET

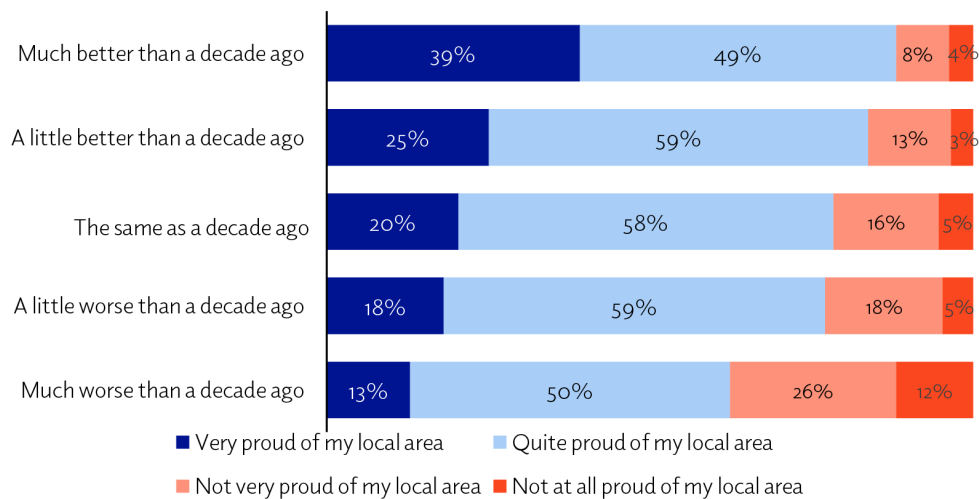
As we saw above, high streets were one of the four most important influences on local pride. This effect can be seen by comparing the perceptions of the high streets and levels of local pride.

If you feel your local high street has got better over the last decade, you are more likely to be proud of where you live

- 1) Is your local high street better, worse or much the same as a decade ago?
- 2) How proud are you of your local area?



My local high street is...



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20835

While a perception of a decline in high streets is widespread, there is also significant variation according to levels of local pride. High streets seem to have a symbolic importance for many respondents. The better the state their high street is deemed to be in, the more proud they are of their local community.

WHO IS TRUSTED TO DELIVER FOR LOCAL AREAS?

WHO IS TRUSTED TO DELIVER FOR LOCAL AREAS?

SUMMARY

People are inclined to believe that people in positions of political authority do not care about their area. The political actors believed to care most about their areas were local councillors. Yet, even here, over 50% respondents believed they did not.

The more local the level of representation, the more likely people are to believe actors care about their area. People are highly sceptical of how much the government knows — or cares — about their area, compared to local councillors or their local MP.

Where people live affects how they feel towards their elected representatives. Those living in urban, metropolitan areas are more likely to believe their local MP is more in touch with local needs. However, those in rural areas think that local government cares more.

In areas where they exist, Metro Mayors are deemed to be less ‘in touch’ with local needs than MPs or Councillors. Ben Houchen, Mayor of Tees Valley, is the most popular Metro Mayor amongst voters. However, even here, only 45% of respondents in the Tees Valley mayoralty believe he cares about the area.

People living in more deprived areas are more likely to believe that the Labour Party cares about their area. Looking regionally, those in the North of England feel Labour cares about their area and those in the South East think the Conservative Party is in tune with where they live.

The public has low levels of trust in English political institutions. We find that around a third of people express trust in mayors, local MPs and councils amongst respondents. However, the level of trust in national government is far lower.

Comparing the performance of Metro Mayors among their voters, we find the highest reported level of trust in Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester. However, Ben Houchen is the Metro Mayor identified by his voters as caring most about the local area.

People are more likely to trust elected representatives if they voted for the party they belong to. Again, people who voted for the party of their mayor, metro mayor or MP in the most recent general election are twice as likely to vote for them as those who didn't. This effect is most pronounced for the Government in Westminster.

Recent Government scandals have affected trust in political institutions. Our focus groups showed that investigations into Government rule breaking had affected trust in Westminster, with respondents declaring themselves to be more likely to question the Government's judgement.

Having looked at what people think about their local area and how it could be improved, we look at which layer of government is thought to care about and understand local areas, and who is trusted to deliver the changes.

This is the first ever national survey to ask directly about political trust in each region of England, made possible by our large overall sample size (20,835). This allows for the first regional-level analysis of the impact of changes to how England is governed over the last decade, including the creation of new Metro Mayors.

WHO CARES ABOUT LOCAL AREAS?

We asked respondents to rank, on a scale from 0 to 10, 'How much do you think the following groups care about your area?'. A response of 0 denotes 'They don't care at all about my area' and 10 indicates 'They care a lot about my area'.

The specific groups we asked about were: the government in Westminster, local councillors, the mayors for the city/region (for the 7,770 respondents living in areas represented by a Mayor — just over a third of the sample), the local MP, and the Conservative and Labour parties. These mayors and MPs were named. For example, if someone was from Yardley in Birmingham, their choices would be as follows:

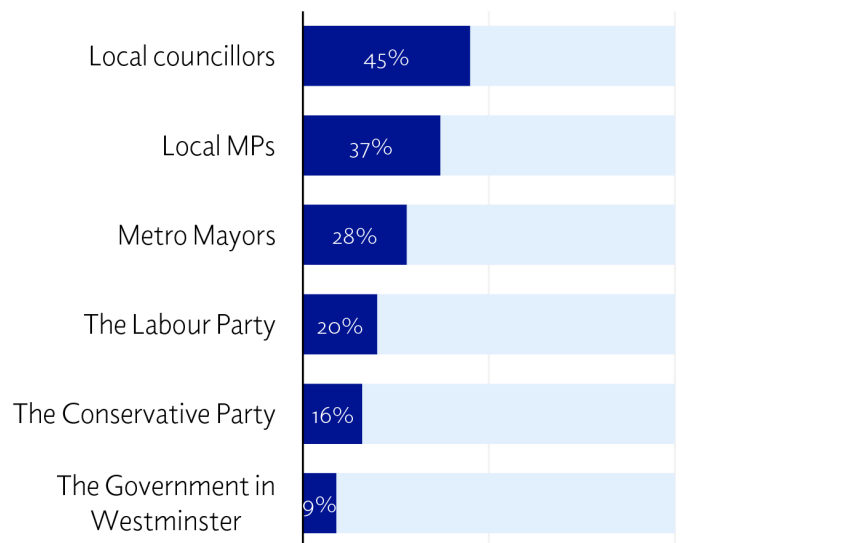
How much do you think the following care about your area?

- The government in Westminster
- Your local councillors
- The mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street
- The MP for Birmingham Yardley, Jess Phillips
- The Labour Party
- The Conservative Party

Just over 45% of respondents consider that local councillors care about their area. The next best-placed group are MPs — at 37% — followed by Mayors at just under 30%. The main political parties come next, with Labour (20%) slightly more trusted than the Conservatives (16%), though the numbers are poor for both. The government in Westminster comes out worse of all: only 9% believe the Government cares about their area.

Local councillors are the layer of government that the public think cares most about their area

*How much do you think the following groups care about your area?
% who felt each care about their local area (6+ on 0-10 scale)*



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 20835

The general pattern is that the more local the level of representation — starting with local councillors — the greater feeling that the political actor cares about the area. This highlights a problem for levelling up: citizens are deeply sceptical about how much the government cares about their area, especially those parts of government that are geographically distant from it. Yet at the same time, their policy priorities can often only be delivered by those from outside the immediate local areas.

We can further explore this data by region. Across each part of England, local councillors, followed by the local MP, are consistently perceived as caring most, followed generally by Mayors in those cities/regions that have them.

Across England, local councillors are the layer of government felt to care most about local areas

How much do you think the following care about your area?
Respondents answering 6-10 on an 11-point scale, by region



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 20,835. n for Metro Mayors is 7770

Whether the Conservative or Labour parties are felt to care most about an area tends to depend on their relative levels of political support there: Labour is felt to care much more about London by people in the capital, but the Conservatives are perceived to care more about the South East by people in that region.

Labour is comfortably ahead in being felt to care more about areas in the North (where they are ahead on this measure by an average of 10 percentage points), whereas the situation is neck-and-neck in the Midlands.

The sentiment that central government does not have a strong grasp of the particular needs of local areas was also found in our focus groups. There was a strong sense that politicians do not understand these areas or their people, or what these areas need to prosper.

There was also a sense that politicians — particularly former Prime Minister Boris Johnson — are not interested in learning about what issues respondents' areas face. Two of the locations visited in our qualitative work — Blyth and Blackpool — had recently hosted the Prime Minister, yet participants felt that

his visit would have done nothing to reveal to him the nature of the place or the problems it is confronting.

We had Boris here the other week and all he went round was the tram area — he didn't see what Blackpool is like. He needs to go up Central Drive and places like that

Blackpool, Female, Group 2

Boris didn't know the difference between if he was in Tyneside or Teesside and that says it all really

Blyth, Male, Group 2

Some were more critical still, arguing it was less a matter of politicians being disinterested in their needs and more that they simply did not care.

Our research also allowed us to look at the individual performance of Metro Mayors in the areas they represent. The survey provides us with on average about 800 respondents by mayoralty (though we had more respondents for some mayoralties than others, with 256 respondents for Ben Houchen compared to 2,264 for Sadiq Khan, meaning that the margin of error for the different mayors varies).

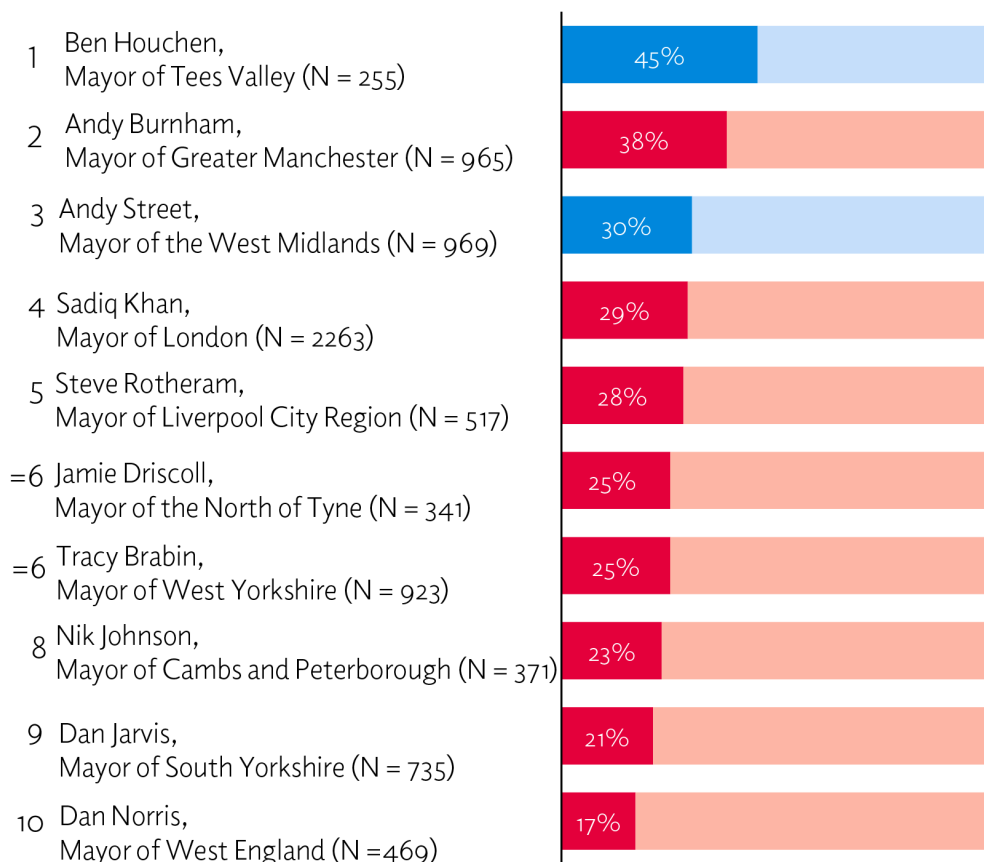
Ben Houchen, Mayor of Tees Valley in the North East, has the highest ratings with his voters, with 45% thinking he cares about the area, followed by Andy Burnham on 38%, Andy Street on 30%, Sadiq Khan on 29%, Steve Rotheram on 28% and Tracey Brabin and Jamie Driscoll on 25%. These ratings partially reflect name recognition — both nationally and regionally.

45% of Tees Valley voters think Ben Houchen cares about their area, the highest ranking for any Metro Mayor

How much do you think X cares about your area?

Respondents answering 6-10 on a 0-10 scale.

Each mayor only presented as an option for respondents in areas they represent.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 7770.

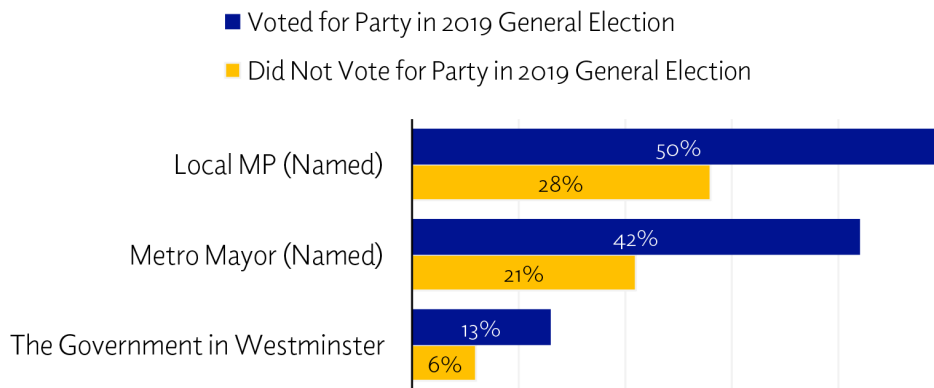
Partisanship clearly influences views of whether elected representatives care about an area. Taking the case of local mayors, 42% of those respondents who voted for the party of the mayor in the 2019 general election felt they cared about their area, contrasted with 21% among those who voted for other parties (or did not vote).

Similarly, 50% of citizens who voted for the party of the constituency MP in 2019 felt they cared about the area as opposed to 28% who voted for other parties. Conservative voters from 2019 were twice as likely to believe that government cared about their area and that their party cared about the area. Party loyalties continue to exert a strong force in British politics.

You are roughly twice as likely to think your local MP cares about your local area if you support the party they represent



How much do you think the following care about your area?
 Respondents answering 6-10 on a 0-10 scale, by party support in 2019.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20835. Metro Mayors analysis N = 7770

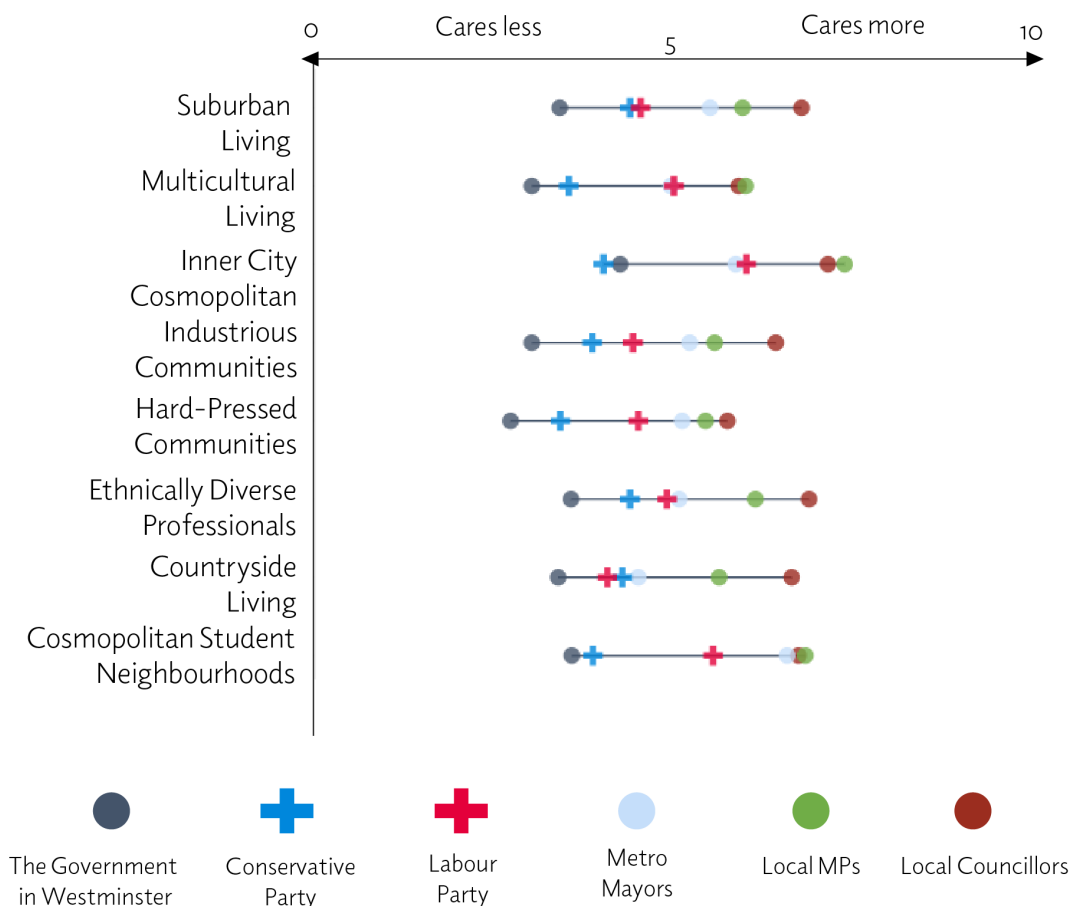
People’s political leanings, and the region they live in, help shape their sense as to whether political authorities care about their area. But do the socio-economic conditions of particular places also impact on peoples’ feelings?

Again, using the ONS groups that divide up neighbourhoods by their social and economic characteristics allows us to understand some of these micro-level differences. In many metropolitan areas, the local MP is seen to be more in touch with local needs than local councillors, whereas in more rural and affluent areas, local government is seen to care more. Across all areas where they exist, Metro Mayors are felt to be less ‘in touch’ than either MPs or local councillors elsewhere in the country.

Deprivation also shapes attitudes. For the Conservatives, we find an increasing propensity for people to believe the party cares more about their area the less deprived they are — ‘Countryside Living’ neighbourhoods are the only type of area where the Conservatives are seen as ‘on their side’. For Labour we see the reverse — people in more deprived areas are more likely to believe that the party cares about their area, with those people living in industrial and ex-industrial areas significantly more likely to think the Labour Party cares about where they live.

Across most types of neighbourhood in England, local councillors are thought to care most about the local area

How much do you think the following care about your area?
Mean scores across different types of neighbourhood (0-10 scale)



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 20,835. n for Metro Mayors is 7770

DO THE PUBLIC TRUST THEIR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES?

Levelling up and political trust are closely interlinked, with levelling up sometimes seen as a project that can restore trust in government. As well as central government — the normal focus of debates over ‘trust in politics’ — local councils, MPs and mayors are all implicated in the drive to ‘level up’. Are there particular groups and places especially lacking in trust? How far do perceptions of decline undermine trust — and which politicians seem to be held accountable?

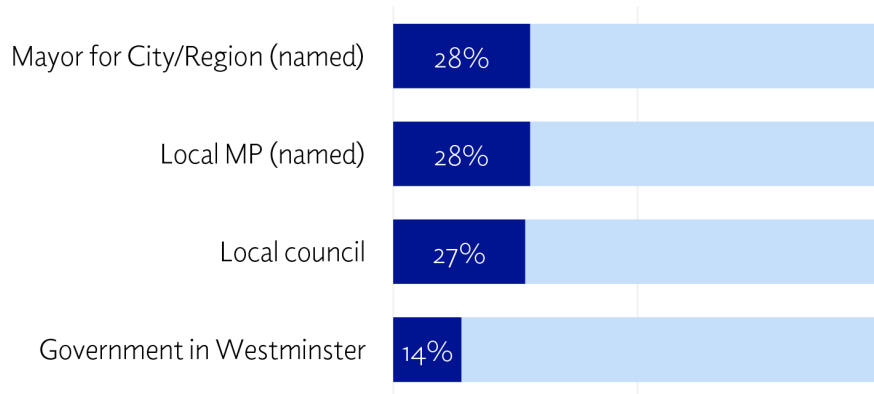
To investigate, we asked respondents how much they trusted a selection of political authorities and government on a scale of 0 to 10: ‘The government in Westminster’, ‘Your local council’, and the (named) local MP and Mayor (in areas where this was relevant). A value of 0 denoted not trusting the authority/actor at all, while 10 indicated they were trusted completely.

The results reveal comparable levels of trust in mayors (28%), local MPs (28%) and local councils (27%), with just under a third of people saying they trusted each of these. The level of trust in national government is far lower (14%). However, none of these figures suggest a deep reservoir of political trust that policymakers can draw upon to tackle complex policy challenges like levelling-up.

Under a third of people saying they trust their local Mayor, MP or council - higher than the 14% who trust the Government



*How much do you think the following care about your area?
Respondents answering 6-10 on an 11-point scale, by party support in 2019.*



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 20,835. Metro Mayor analysis n 7770.

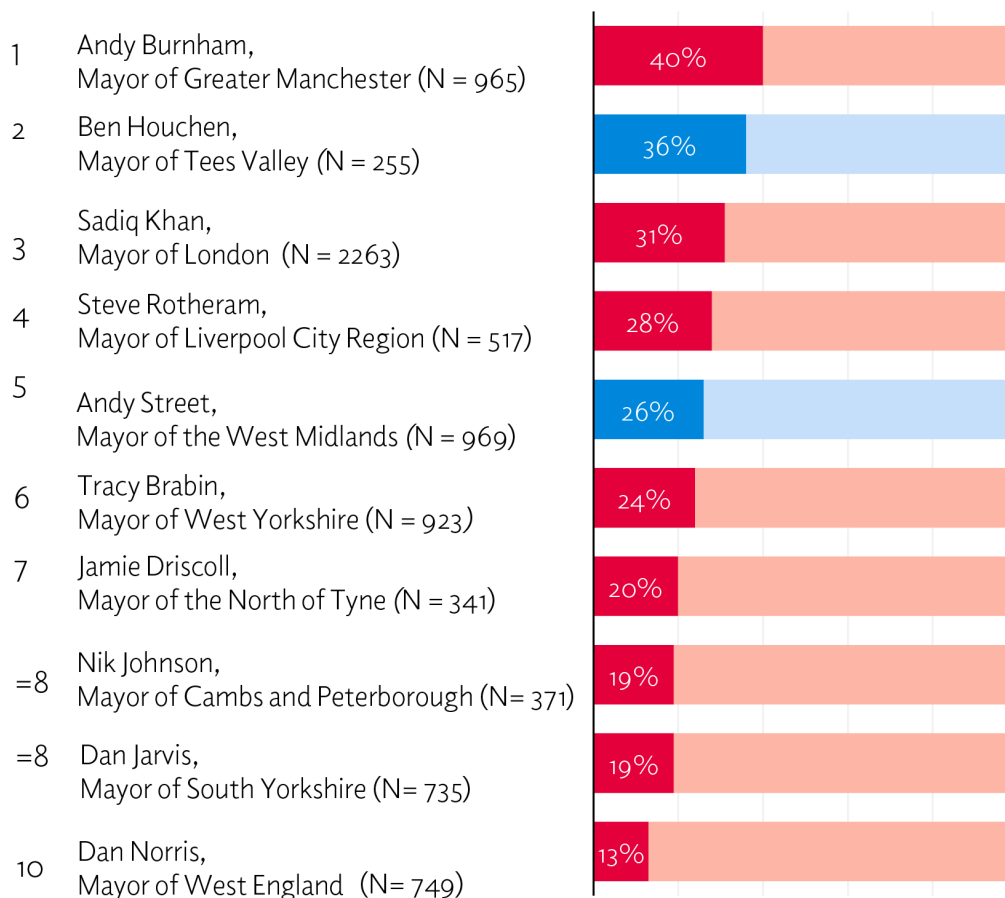
Turning next to levels of trust in individual mayors, we see the highest reported level of trust in Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester (40%), followed by Ben Houchen in Tees Valley (36%), Sadiq Khan in London (31%) and Steve Rotherham in Liverpool (28%). This again partly reflects profile, but it is noteworthy that Burnham and Houchen swapped places here — with Burnham the most trusted Mayor (whereas Houchen was seen to care more about his area) — but overall these changes in ordering are based on fairly small variations between the two survey measures.

Andy Burnham is the Metro Mayor most trusted by the people that he represents

Do you trust each of the following?

% of respondents answering 6-10 on a 0-10 scale

Each mayor only presented as an option for respondents in areas they represent.



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 7770.

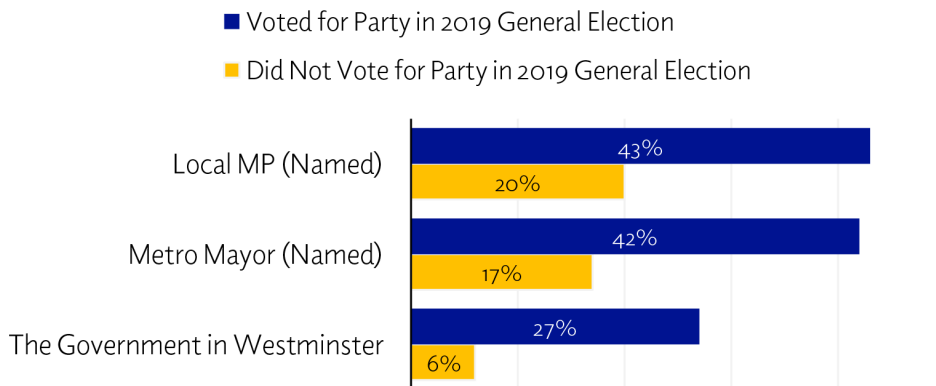
We again see differences according to partisanship, with citizens who voted for the party of their local Mayor or MP in the 2019 general election more than twice as likely to trust them as those who didn't — but with an even greater partisan gap in trust in the Government at Westminster.

Trust in your local MP, your local Metro Mayor and the Government in Westminster falls on partisan lines

How much do you trust the following?

Respondents answering 6-10 on a 0-10 scale, by party support in 2019.

UK IN A
CHANGING
EUROPE



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. N = 20835. Metro Mayors analysis N = 7770

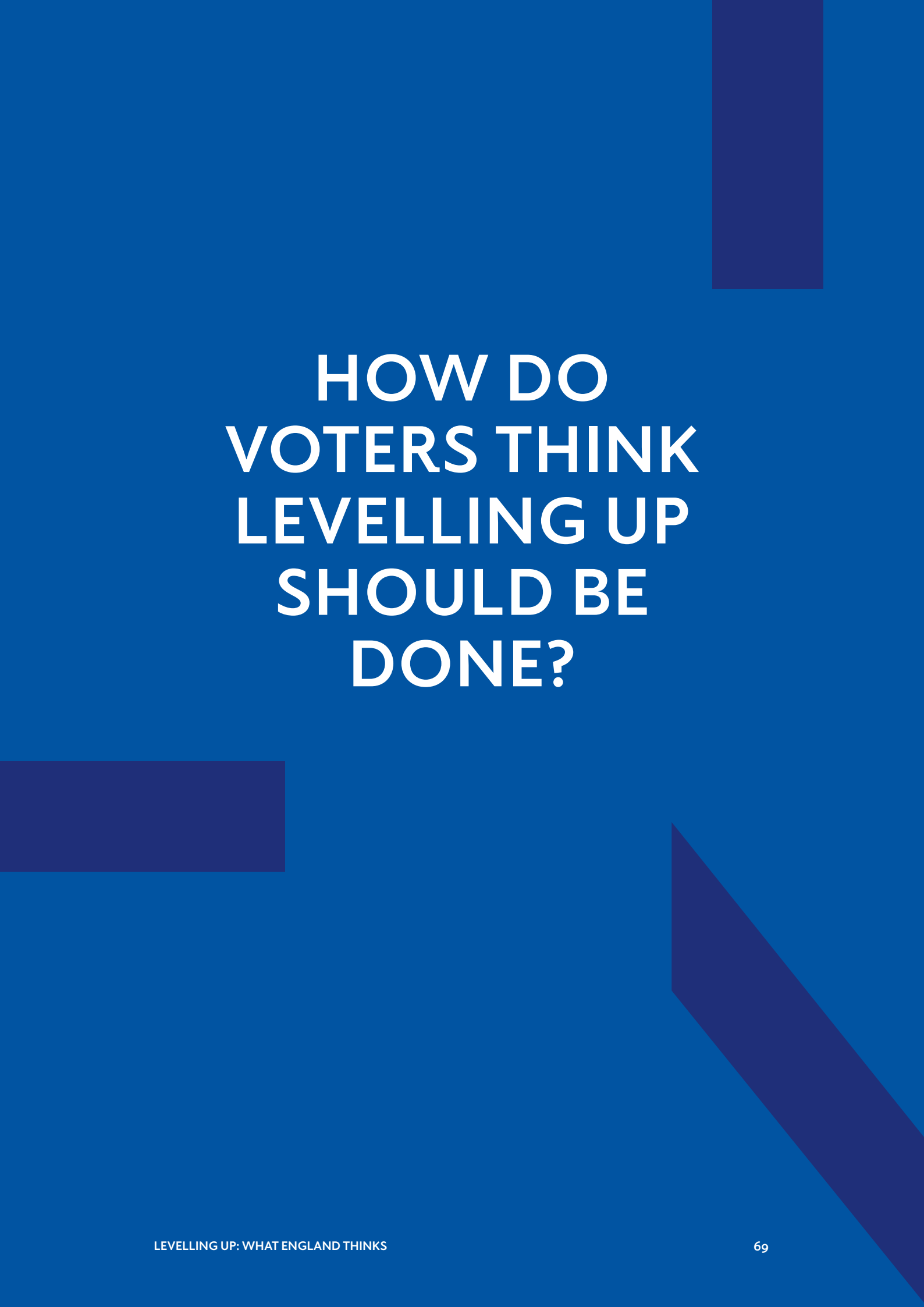
However, our focus groups showed that the recent investigations into government rule breaking during lockdown had done the Conservatives no favours when it came to being trusted, regardless of political affiliation. Participants explained that they had done their part during the pandemic and abided by the rules, often at great personal cost in terms of their mental and financial wellbeing. Knowing that the government were not doing the same called into question their judgement.

Everyone's isolating and they're all having a party! I just feel like there's no trust when then comes back and makes you think if there is funding will it go to the right places?

Barnsley, Male, Group 2

They're vipers! I hate them

Nottingham, Female, Group 2



HOW DO VOTERS THINK LEVELLING UP SHOULD BE DONE?

HOW DO VOTERS THINK LEVELLING UP SHOULD BE DONE?

SUMMARY

The public prefer decisions on local funding to be made using a needs-based approach. A process excluding ministerial discretion is the most popular amongst respondents, a vote of no confidence in the existing system for levelling-up funds.

People's political beliefs have an effect on the projects they prefer. For example, town centre and high street regeneration projects are much more popular amongst older Conservative and Leave voters.

Local community consultation and full transparency are key. Whether or not the local community is consulted on a project, and the transparency of the process, matters just as much as the amount of money that is spent on a levelling up project.

Cultural and heritage projects are not as popular as other policy alternatives. Despite being one of the key 'levelling up' priorities, cultural and heritage projects are much less popular targets for spending amongst respondents than alternatives.

In principle, 'levelling up' is popular. Indeed, participants in both our focus groups and our survey were broadly supportive of the Government's agenda.

Yet there are many thorny questions about both the what and the how of levelling up. Clearly, there are some elements people can broadly get behind. However, people's ideas on what local communities need, how these policies should be delivered, and who should deliver them, vary based on where people live and who they are.

To bring together the various themes raised in this report — and to try and get a sense of the ultimate priorities of voters when it comes to levelling up — we deployed an experiment.

THE METHOD

In this experiment, using a method known as a 'conjoint experiment', respondents were presented with two, randomly generated policy proposals for investment in their area and asked to choose the option they most preferred out of the two.

Each pair of policy proposals varied on nine different dimensions, relating to the process and outcomes of the proposal:

1. **What is being invested in?** The policy proposals presented to voters could focus on one of town centre regeneration, transport infrastructure, cultural spending, building and upgrading schools, building and upgrading hospitals.
2. **Timing:** Whether project is delivered in 2, 5 or 10 years.
3. **Money spent.** Whether the money spent is £5, £10, £20 or £50 million.
4. **Private vs public.** Whether private sector or public sector contractors are used.
5. **Council involvement.** Whether the local council is involved in the developing plans.
6. **Community involvement.** Whether the local community is consulted.
7. **MP involvement.** Whether or not it is backed by the local MP.
8. **Transparency.** Whether full details of how the money was spent are made public.
9. **Decision system.** Whether the decision was made after a) after bidding to a minister, b) a bidding process to an independent expert, c) based on a funding formula or d) decided unilaterally by a minister.

For example, a respondent might be presented with the following pair of proposals, and asked which they prefer of the two:

	Proposal A	Proposal B
Policy	Improving local transport connectivity and infrastructure	Building and upgrading hospitals
Decision system	Your area has to bid against others for the investment. Bids are judged by independent experts	Your area has to bid against others for the investment. Bids are judged by independent experts
Private or Public investment?	Built and maintained by a private company, paid for by the public sector	Built and maintained by the public sector
Community involvement	The local community has not been consulted on plans	The local community has not been consulted on plans
Council involvement	The local council was involved in developing plans	The local council was not involved in developing plans
MP involvement	The local MP did not formally support plans	The local MP did not formally support plans
Timing	Will be completed in 10 years' time	Will be completed in 10 years' time
Transparency	The public will not get full details of how the money is spent	The public will not get full details of how the money is spent
Value	£50 million	£10 million

More information on these attributes, and the proposals presented to respondents, can be found in the [Annex](#). Each of our 20,000 respondents was asked to choose between four different pairs of randomly generated proposals. This created a huge sample of around 80,000 responses, which we can analyse to better ascertain which parts of ‘levelling up’ policy voters prioritise most — from the level of investment, to how long it project takes to complete, to what the policy itself focuses on.

Crucially, in this experiment, respondents cannot ‘have their cake and eat it’. For example, if we asked people solely about whether they would prefer a high or a low value proposal, or between allowing their community a say on how the investment is spent or not, we would expect overwhelming preference for both high spending and community involvement.

However, in this experiment, people have to consider the trade-offs of the two different policy proposals they are presented with. For instance, respondents could be made to choose between a *high-value* proposal *without* community involvement and a *low-value* one *with* community involvement. Respondents, therefore, have to prioritise and tell us what aspects of levelling policy matter most to them.

WHAT DOES THE PUBLIC PRIORITISE?

The figure below presents the results for all respondents. Look at the grey line in the centre: if the coloured dot is to the right of this grey line, then the feature of a policy proposal which we asked about (e.g., building hospitals or investing £50 million) is very popular with the public, and increases support for the policy proposal. If the coloured dot is to the left of this grey line, the feature we asked about (e.g., investment in cultural and heritage sites or not involving a local council in the process) is not very popular with the public, and reduced support for a policy proposal.

A feature scoring 100% means that respondents would always choose a policy proposal that included that feature, regardless of what else it contained- for example, if ‘building and upgrading schools’ scored 100%, the public would trade-off everything else to have school investment in the policy proposal, no matter the timing, value or implications of the proposal. If it scored 0%, the public would always reject a policy proposal that included this feature. This allows us to see what is most important to the public when it comes to ‘levelling up’ policies.

The relative importance of nine different factors in determining support for levelling up projects



Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April - 1st May 2022. n 20835

Our results reveal that, when it comes to levelling up, everything matters. There are very few features about which the public are completely neutral. At the same time, some features of levelling up policy are clearly more important to the public than others.

The single largest effects — both positive and negative — are related to what is being invested in. ‘Building and upgrading hospitals’ is an especially popular policy option. This chimes with both the priorities people expressed for improving their local areas and the findings of our focus groups, where respondents viewed healthcare access as a top priority for improving their areas.

Respondents believed the need for investment in healthcare was more urgent than ever and that COVID-19 had placed already under-funded mental health services under unbearable strain. Addressing this successfully would, they thought, unlock potential in their local area:

We hear a lot about mental health and we do have a lot of people who suffer with mental health issues in Blackpool which then relates to not a very good standard of living — not taking pride in where they live

Blackpool, Female, Group 2

In contrast to the widespread support for spending on health, the experiment revealed that investment in managing and maintaining cultural and heritage investment is far less popular amongst the public, and is certainly not a priority.

People also prefer outcomes to be delivered quickly. A project which can be delivered in two years is nine percentage points more popular than a project which will take 10 years to complete. However, the public is generally supportive of projects that can be delivered within five years. This suggests that the Conservative Party has until the end of this parliament to make inroads on levelling up, but asking for a whole other Parliament to deliver change may be problematic.

As one would expect, the more expensive a project is, the more popular it will be amongst the public. Projects valued at £50 million are 11 percentage points more popular than those worth £5 million. However, perhaps more surprisingly, transparency is a key priority for respondents: releasing the full details of spending plans increases support for a policy proposal by 12 percentage points.

How decisions about investment are made — and who is involved with the implementation of and consultation on projects — is very important to respondents, and has a big impact on public support for policy proposals. Firstly, we turn to how levelling up funds are allocated; the most popular option amongst respondents was a needs-based formula for allocating investment. The second most popular option was a bidding process judged by independent experts.

However, any process involving government ministers- regardless of whether a bidding process was included or not- was less popular amongst respondents. It is worth flagging, however, that the difference between the most and least popular options was just 6 percentage points — perhaps not a dealbreaker.

In our focus groups, we also found a high level of awareness among participants that, as part of the allocation of the Levelling Up Fund, local authorities have been required to bid for money from central government to fund specific schemes. Again, this was unpopular- some believed that this process would serve to embed

inequalities rather than close the gap, as those local authorities that already benefited from higher levels of funding are better placed to write such bids and, therefore, have a higher chance of obtaining more money.

Some of the bigger places have paid £1million for somebody to write a bid. That's a lot of money and it shouldn't be like that. It should be looked at for what it is

Barnsley, Female, Group 1

With regards to developing plans for investment, the involvement of local political actors tends to increase support for a policy proposal. For example, if councils were involved in developing a proposal, our respondents were roughly 7 percentage points more likely to support it. Support from a local MP also tended to bolster support for policy proposals somewhat, by around 4 percentage points.

However, the largest effect upon proposal support was observed for the involvement of the local community. Proposals which provided for community consultation were 11 percentage points more popular than those without.

Our focus groups were similarly enthusiastic about the prospect of community involvement in the implementation of levelling up policies. Participants mentioned a variety of potential mechanisms, including surveys, online consultations and town hall meetings.

Make more decisions as long as they involve the people and their constituents instead of making decisions just within their own little board, cabinet or whatever. Things like this. Offering community discussions in community halls

Blackpool, Female, Group 2

We could voice our opinions more, push for things like this. We were saying that we're here for power for the people. Yes! Maybe I'm going to stand up and shout about it!

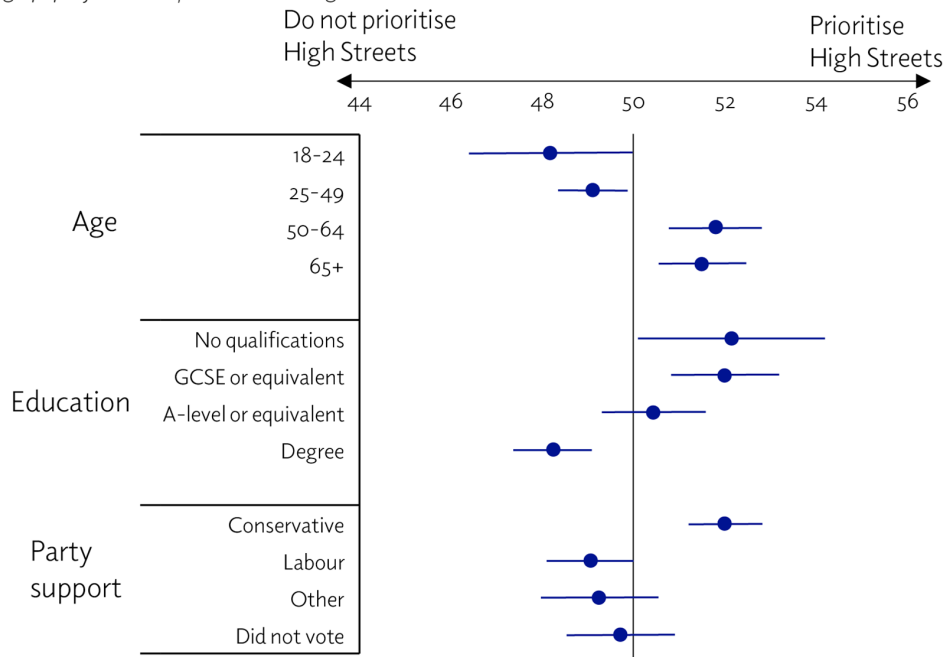
Blackpool, Female, Group 2

Finally, when it came to public versus private investment, projects delivered solely via public sector construction and maintenance were around 7 percentage points more popular than those using private contractors.

Support for proposals is generally shared across demographic, geographic and political groups, though with some exceptions. While the public is generally neutral on town centre and high street regeneration, the figure below shows differences by age, education and political views: action to address problems with local high streets are favoured by older Conservatives and those with fewer qualifications though not by younger and degree educated Labour supporters, though as we saw above these voters are more likely to live in areas where there is already a more positive perception of local high streets.

Older Conservative voters without a degree are most likely to prioritise high street regeneration

Result of a conjoint experiment, demonstrating the relative support for 'levelling up' projects that focus on local high streets/town centres



Source: Source: UK in a Changing Europe/YouGov. Fieldwork: 19th April – 1st May 2022. n 20,835

ANNEX

ANNEX

METHODOLOGIES

The survey

This survey was conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc GB panel of 185,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey and providing a link to the survey. The sample is weighted to provide a representative reporting sample for adults in England. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 20,835 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th April — 1st May 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults in England (aged 18+).

THE FOCUS GROUPS

These focus groups were conducted by NatCen.

Locations

The five focus group locations were selected according to the following criteria:

- Within the 100 most deprived local authorities in England according to Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)
- Areas where the Conservatives experienced a significant increase in vote share in the 2019 election compared to the 2017 election (in which ‘Levelling Up’ was not a campaign promise)

We also sought to have a range of cities, towns and coastal or rural locations, as inequality is experienced differently across these types of places.

Two focus groups were held in each of the following locations:

- Barking and Dagenham
- Blackpool
- Nottingham
- Blyth
- Barnsley

Recruitment

For each location, recruiters engaged and recruited members of the public who lived within 30 minutes of each focus group location. They used a screening questionnaire to achieve a balance of ages, genders and ethnicities to ensure diversity and inclusion of participants. They also monitored past voting behaviour and future voting intention, and socio-economic grades based on occupation to ensure a range of perspectives would be represented.

Researchers conducted the focus groups in-person between 4th and 12th May 2022.

Sample

The table below sets out the achieved sample for each of the key criteria, within each location and each group. In total, 80 people were recruited to take part in focus groups, and 75 attended.

Table 1. Achieved sample

Location	Criteria	Group 1	Group 2
Barking and Dagenham	Age	All 18-39: 1 aged 18-29 4 aged 30-39	All 40-64: 5 aged 40-49 3 aged 50-64
	Ethnicity	1 Asian or Asian British 1 Mixed 3 White British	2 Asian or Asian British 2 Black or Black British 4 White British
	Voting	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour
	Gender	3 female 2 male	2 female 6 male
	Occupation	Maximum of 2 A/B participants	Maximum of 2 A/B participants
	Total attended	5	8
Blackpool	Age	All 65+	All 40-64: 2 aged 40-49 4 aged 50-64
	Ethnicity	8 White British (no quota set)	6 White British (no quota set)
	Voting	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour
	Gender	3 female 5 male	4 female 2 male
	Occupation	Maximum of 2 A/B participants	Maximum of 2 A/B participants
	Total attended	8	6

Table 1. continued

Location	Criteria	Group 1	Group 2
Nottingham	Age	All 18-39	All 40-64
	Ethnicity	1 Asian or Asian British 1 Mixed 6 White British	1 Asian or Asian British 1 Black or Black British 6 White British
	Voting	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour
	Gender	3 female 5 male	4 female 4 male
	Occupation	Maximum of 2 A/B participants	Maximum of 2 A/B participants
	Total attended	8	8
Blythe	Age	All 18-39	All 40-64
	Ethnicity	8 White British (no quota set)	8 White British (no quota set)
	Voting	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour
	Gender	4 female 4 male	4 female 4 male
	Occupation	Maximum of 2 A/B participants	Maximum of 2 A/B participants
	Total attended	8	8

Table 1. continued

Location	Criteria	Group 1	Group 2
Barnsley	Age	All 65+	All 18-39: 5 aged 18-29 3 aged 30-39
	Ethnicity	8 White British (no quota set)	1 Mixed 7 White British
	Voting	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour	Minimum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Conservative Maximum 2-3 voted or intending to vote Labour
	Gender	4 female 4 male	4 female 4 male
	Occupation	Maximum of 2 A/B participants	Maximum of 2 A/B participants
	Total attended	8	8

GEOGRAPHIES

We explore local pride at three geographic levels: by constituency, by groups of constituency, by region and according to an ONS classification called [‘supergroups’](#).

Region

The regions used in this work were:

- North East (1034 respondents in weighted sample)
- North West (2660)
- Yorkshire and the Humber (2211)
- East Midlands (2032)
- West Midlands (2088)
- East of England (2445)
- London (2264)
- South East (3600)
- South West (2501)

By city and town classification:

This is a classification of area type using the classification of constituencies developed by the House of Commons library. Each Lower Layer Super Output Area LSOA in England is assigned to one of six categories, according to its population distribution. These categories are:

Core cities: Major population and economic centres (e.g. London)

Other cities: Other settlements with a population of more than 175,000 (e.g. Leicester)

Large towns: Settlements with a population of between 60,000 and 174,999 (e.g. Warrington)

Medium towns: Settlements with a population between 25,000 and 59,999 (e.g. Jarrow)

Small towns: Settlements with a population between 7,500 and 24,999 (e.g. Falmouth)

Villages and small communities: Settlements with a population of up to 7,500 (e.g. Cottenham)

By type of place

Using the 2011 census, the [Office of National Statistics](#) has been able to zoom in on the local characteristics of places in England and categorised small areas (of around 1500 individuals) based on demographic, household, housing, socio-economic and employment characteristics into one of eight groups. These are known as ‘supergroups’. These groups, and how they are defined, are as follows:

Table 2. Supergroups

Name of Supergroup	% of Population	Population Density (people per hm ²)	Median Age	Unemployment Rate (%)	Where?	Type of Housing	Employment/Education	Ethnic Mix
Cosmopolitan Student Neighbourhoods	4.1	38.2	26	3.7	Cities and major towns containing universities.	Residents much more likely to live in communal establishments (e.g., halls of residences or shared flats), and in rented accommodation.	Large proportions of households with full-time students. Qualification levels are higher than the national average. Those who are employed are more likely to work in the accommodation or food service industries, and to work part time.	Above average ethnic mix.
Countryside Living	13.5	0.4	46	2.6	Rural areas.	Residents are more likely than any other supergroup to live in detached housing. They are also much more likely to own their own property.	The proportion of people in this group with higher qualifications is above the national average. Unemployment rates are below the national average. Residents are more likely to work in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries, and get to work via private transport.	Below average ethnic mix.
Ethnically Diverse Professionals	13.9	18.8	38	3.6	Largely in cities, on the fringes of cities, or in other urban areas.	Residents much more likely to live in a flat.	The proportion of people with higher qualifications is above the national average. Unemployment rates are below the national average, and residents are more likely to work in the information, communication, and financial industries. They are more likely to work full-time.	Above average ethnic mix.
Hard-pressed Communities	15	29.2	36	7.5	Current or former industrial areas, in cities and larger towns.	Residents are much more likely to live in a terraced property or flat, and to live in social rented accommodation.	The proportion of people with higher qualifications is below the national average. Unemployment rates are significantly above the national average. Employed residents are more likely to work in transport, storage, administrative or support industries. More likely to use public transport to travel to work.	Below average ethnic mix.

Table 2. continued

Name of Supergroup	% of Population	Population Density (people per hm ²)	Median Age	Unemployment Rate (%)	Where?	Type of Housing	Employment/Education	Ethnic Mix
Industrial Communities	20.6	10.3	42	4.1	Industrial areas.	Residents are more likely to live in detached, semi-detached or terraced housing, and to live in social rented accommodation.	The number of residents with higher qualifications is below the national average. Employed residents are more likely to work in the manufacturing, mining, quarrying or construction industries. They are more likely to travel to work using private transport.	Below average ethnic mix.
Multicultural Living	10.7	46.8	31	7	Focused in larger urban areas.	Residents are more likely to live in terraced housing or flats, and to rent privately or via social housing.	Qualification levels are similar to the national average. Unemployment rates are higher than the national average. Employed residents are much more likely to work in the transport or storage industries, and to work part-time. Residents in this group are more likely to use public transport to travel to work.	Very high ethnic mix.
Inner City Cosmopolitan	5.9	93.9	32	5.5	Concentrated in Inner London, parts of Outer London, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester.	Residents are far more likely than average to live in a flat, and are more likely to live in private or socially-rented accommodation.	The proportion of people with higher qualifications is above the national average. Unemployment rates are above the national average. Employed residents are more likely to work in the information, communication, and financial industries. They are far more likely to work full-time.	Huge ethnic mix.
Suburban Living	16.3	10.8	45	2.5	In areas within or in close proximity to larger urban areas.	Residents are much more likely to live in a detached property, and to own their own property.	The number of people with higher qualifications in this group is above average. Unemployment rates in this group are the lowest of all supergroups, and employed residents are much more likely to work in financial industries. Three quarters of this group use private transport to travel to work, the highest of all supergroups.	Below average ethnic mix.

CONJOINT EXPERIMENT

Table 3.

Attribute	Options
OUTCOME	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building and upgrading schools 2. Building and upgrading hospitals 3. Town centre and high street regeneration 4. Improving local transport connectivity and infrastructure 5. Maintaining and regenerating cultural and heritage sites 6. Will be completed in 2 years' time 7. Will be completed in 5 years' time 8. Will be completed in 10 years' time
Policy	<p>Three of the policy options are drawn up to reflect the specific 'investment themes' of the Levelling Up Fund: town centre, transport, and cultural spending. We added two further options to reflect more long-standing policy priorities sometimes grouped under 'levelling up' — for example, the government touts '40 new hospitals' as a 'levelling up' of the NHS.</p>
Timing	<p>The government's intention is to deliver levelling-up projects within the lifetime of this Parliament (two remaining years), but many suggest that only longer time frames, such as 5-10, are realistic.</p>
Value	<p>Some levelling-up projects are bigger than others. In the first round of Levelling Up Fund spending, the largest project was worth nearly £50m, but most projects were valued more at or near £20m, with some lower still.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. £5 million will be invested 10. £10 million will be invested 11. £20 million will be invested 12. £50 million will be invested
Private vs public	<p>The role of private contractors in building and maintaining amenities is often politicised and divisive. We are keen to understand how this might apply to levelling-up policy.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Built and maintained by the public sector 14. Built and maintained by a contracted private sector company paid by the public sector

Table 3. continued

<p>PROCESS</p>	<p>Council involvement Some schemes (such as the upcoming Shared Prosperity Fund) allow more role for local authority input. We can understand whether local council involvement builds support.</p>	<p>15. The local council was included in developing the plans 16. The local council was not involved in developing the plans</p>
<p>Community involvement</p>	<p>Localism has been a stated priority of successive governments, and one possible approach to levelling-up includes a role for more consultation. We include proposals with and without meetings and surveys that consult locals on schemes.</p>	<p>17. The local community has been consulted on the plans through public meetings and surveys 18. The local community has not been consulted on the plans</p>
<p>MP involvement</p>	<p>In judging levelling-up bids, existing policy gives some weight to backing from local MPs. How far is this an important criterion for the public?</p>	<p>19. The local MP gave their formal support to the proposal 20. The local MP did not formally support the proposal</p>
<p>Transparency</p>	<p>The Levelling-Up White Paper argues for ‘improved transparency about place-based spending’, but the Public Accounts Committee suggests that there is a ‘chronic lack’ of it in local government. Transparency is classically attractive to the public — how does that apply to levelling up?</p>	<p>21. Full details of how the money was spent will be released to the public 22. The public will not get the full details of how the money was spent</p>
<p>Decision system</p>	<p>How the government decides between places is perhaps the most controversial aspect of levelling-up policy of all. We specify four possible alternative systems. The first broadly reflects the existing process for various funds. The second also involves a bidding process but removes the ‘politicised’ element by leaving decisions to independent experts. The third, a pure needs-based system. The final option is pure ministerial discretion.</p>	<p>23. Your area had to bid against other areas for the investment, and bids were judged by government ministers 24. Your area had to bid against other areas for the investment, and bids were judged by independent experts 25. Government allocated funding across the country based on a formula ranking areas according to need 26. Government ministers decided by themselves that your area needed investment</p>

EXEMPLAR SURVEY SCREEN



The government in Westminster is currently considering proposals for 'levelling up' which involve spending public money on various projects around the country.

In the next few questions, we will ask you to compare a series of pairs of hypothetical proposals for investment in your area.

We will call them Proposal A and Proposal B. For each pair of proposals, please say which one you would prefer.

You will be asked to make a total of **4** comparisons. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers.



	Proposal A	Proposal B
Timing	Will be completed in 10 years' time	Will be completed in 10 years' time
Decision system	Your area had to bid against other areas for the investment, and bids were judged by independent experts	Your area had to bid against other areas for the investment, and bids were judged by independent experts
Private vs public	Built and maintained by a contracted private sector company paid by the public sector	Built and maintained by the public sector
Community involvement	The local community has <i>not</i> been consulted on the plans	The local community has <i>not</i> been consulted on the plans
Council involvement	The local council was included in developing the plans	The local council was <i>not</i> involved in developing the plans
Policy	Improving local transport connectivity and infrastructure	Building and upgrading hospitals
MP involvement	The local MP did <i>not</i> formally support the proposal	The local MP did <i>not</i> formally support the proposal
Transparency	The public will <i>not</i> get the full details of how the money was spent	The public will <i>not</i> get the full details of how the money was spent
Value	£50 million will be invested	£10 million will be invested

Which proposal would you prefer to be implemented?

Proposal A

Proposal B



UK in a Changing Europe promotes rigorous, high-quality and independent research into the complex and ever changing relationship between the UK and the EU. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and based at King's College London.

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